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# **RISK VS. RISK TRADE-OFFS: PRESIDENTIAL DECISION-MAKING AND THE EMERGENCE OF FOREIGN POLICY CRISES**

**LUCA TRENTA**

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations

**School of Government & International Affairs**

**University of Durham**

**2013**



**Abstract.** With the radicalisation of the ‘War on Terror’ and the chaos following the 2003 Iraq War, the concept of ‘risk’ emerged as central to a wide-ranging set of claims about the extent and significance of the changed post-Cold War strategic environment and its impact on policy-making. International Relations (IR) scholars argued that ‘risk’ and ‘risk management’ defined foreign policy-making, with the US as the principal exemplar of such a change. The thesis explores the two, sociologically rooted, accounts of risk that underpin this literature – indebted to Ulrich Beck and Michel Foucault respectively – to identify the deeply contrasting and contradictory conceptualisations of risk they produce. Returning to some classic, and badly neglected, writing on risk and highlighting an alternative account originally developed by John Graham and Jonathan Wiener, the thesis establishes Presidential decision-making in foreign policy as a series of ‘risk versus risk trade-offs.’ This framework focuses on the ways in which risk operates simultaneously in different environments via concepts of ‘political risks’ focusing on the domestic environment and ‘strategic risks’ focusing on the international dimension. The concept of trade-off elucidates the ways in which actions aimed at countering a ‘target risk’ frequently produce ‘countervailing risks’ of their own.

Using this approach, the thesis assesses the build-up to three crises in US foreign policy; two from the Cold War (the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Iran hostage crisis) and one from the post-Cold War period (the road to Srebrenica). The case studies, based on archival research and interviews, effectively challenge the claim that the end of the Cold War represented the onset of an era of foreign policy-making as risk management, by showing how the Kennedy and Carter administrations engaged in policy-making practices and processes that are not markedly dissimilar from Clinton’s. In addition, the case studies enrich the ‘risk literature’ and demonstrate how the analysis of crises can be advanced by understanding the moment of crisis as the culmination of a series of neglected ‘countervailing risks.’ More generally, the thesis points to the initial validity of an approach that can be applied to diverse issues in foreign policy-making.



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**Declaration**

No material for this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other University.

The work is solely that of the author, Luca Trenta, under the supervision of Prof. John Dumbrell and Prof. John Williams.

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*To mum and dad.*

*To Cristina.*

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 MAIN ARGUMENT OF THE THESIS

*Students and practitioners of international politics are at present in a strange predicament. Complex though their problems have been in the past, there was then at least some certainty about the “givens,” the basic structure and the basic phenomena of international relations.*<sup>1</sup>

John Herz, 1957.

With the radicalisation of the ‘War on Terror’ and the chaos following the 2003 Iraq War, the concept of ‘risk’ emerged as central to a wide-ranging set of claims about the extent and significance of the changed strategic environment and its impact on policy-making. Leading International Relations (IR) scholars argued that ‘risk’ and ‘risk management’ defined foreign policy-making, with the US as the principal exemplar of such a change. More specifically, two rich and diverse bodies of literature developed: one inspired by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck’s theory of the ‘risk society,’ the other inspired by the French philosopher Michel Foucault’s work on security. The thesis starts with an exploration of these sociologically rooted accounts. It argues that, although starting from different perspectives and drawing on different authors, both schools assume the existence of a radical break, a historical divide, between an era of certainty, generally identified with the Cold War, and an era of uncertainty and risk identified mainly with the post-Cold War world. This thesis is, above all, an effort to evaluate the propositions that support these interpretations.

The thesis, however, also acknowledges that the deeply contrasting and contradictory conceptualisations of risk these scholarships produce make a direct evaluation of these propositions impossible. Equally unclear is the interpretation of risk and of the role of risk in foreign policy provided by studies in ‘decision theory.’ For this reason, the thesis is also a contribution to the risk literature, establishing a clear and viable connection between risk

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<sup>1</sup> John Herz, ‘Rise and Demise of the territorial state,’ *World Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (July 1957), p. 473.



and foreign policy decision-making. Returning to some classic, and badly neglected, writing on risk and highlighting an account originally developed by John Graham and Jonathan Wiener, the thesis establishes Presidential decision-making in US foreign policy as a series of 'risk vs. risk trade-offs.' This alternative offers a number of crucial advantages to either the Beck or Foucault-derived approaches. First, it suggests the relevance of risk and of practices of risk management in US foreign policy decision-making. Second, it establishes a framework of analysis that focuses on the ways in which risk operates simultaneously in different environments via concepts of 'political risks' - focusing on the domestic environment - and 'strategic risks' - focusing on the international dimension. Third, it better conceptualises the ways in which actions aimed at countering a 'target risk' frequently produce 'countervailing risks' of their own. More generally, providing a clear interpretation of the role of risk in foreign policy, the 'risk vs. risk trade-off' framework enables a critical assessment of the claim that the end of the Cold War marked a moment of fundamental transformation in the policy-making environment.

Using this approach, the thesis assesses the build-up to three crises in US foreign policy: two from the Cold War (the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Iran hostage crisis) and one from the post-Cold War period (the road to Srebrenica). Through this analysis the thesis contextualises the emergence of crises as culminations of a series of neglected 'countervailing' risks arising from efforts to tackle a 'target' risk. The thesis shows how the Kennedy and Carter administrations engaged in policy-making practices and processes that were not markedly dissimilar from those adopted by the Clinton Administration. In this sense, the reconceptualisation of risk and the study of crises help the thesis reach its original destination, suggesting continuity along the Cold War/Post-Cold War divide, where previously a radical break seemed to predominate.

## 1.2 PLAN OF THE THESIS

**Chapter 2** starts with a discussion of the Beckian and Foucauldian literatures. This review deals with both the original works in sociology and with their 'translations' in IR. The chapter identifies three main propositions supporting the existence of a radical break in the nature and practice of US foreign policy decision-making. First, the two scholarships position risk and uncertainty as radically new features of the international context. Second, both schools identify a change in the practice of foreign policy - brought about by the rise of risk - with a shift from long-term strategies to short-term practices of risk management. Third, the two schools provide extreme (albeit radically opposed) views of the role and possibilities of the foreign policy decision-maker. At this stage, the chapter acknowledges that the effort to evaluate the strength and depth of these propositions is stymied by the weaknesses and contradictions in the conceptualisations of risk and uncertainty provided within these literatures. The thesis, then, starts the search for better understanding of these concepts. This search touches upon several interpretations provided in 'decision theory.' In spite of the impressive richness of this literature, the chapter concludes with a 'bleak' report card suggesting the need for a reconceptualisation of risk and uncertainty.

**Chapter 3** provides this reconceptualisation. The chapter starts with a collection of hints regarding the role of risk and uncertainty, available in the foreign policy literature. As the analysis progresses, the focus shifts from the more general discussion of foreign policy, to a more specific interpretation of US Presidents and their role in foreign policy decision-making. This shift is made necessary by the focus on US foreign policy prevalent in both sociologically rooted analyses of risk and in the 'decision theory' literature. Looking at the work of Thomas Schelling, Richard Neustadt, Alan Lamborn and Alexander George the chapter suggests that US Presidents are called to balance risks in the domestic context against risks in the international one. After this review, the second part of **Chapter 3** provides operational

definitions of risk, uncertainty, and risk management. Having specified what risk, uncertainty, and risk management mean, the definitional effort permits the re-interpretation of Presidential decision-making as a specific form of risk management. US Presidents, the chapter suggests confront a series of 'risk vs. risk trade-offs.' For each choice Presidents are called to balance domestic political risks against strategic international risks. The outcomes of this balancing act are affected by both the prevailing uncertainty and by the short-termism of the choices made. Having provided this reinterpretation, the chapter identifies the emergence of foreign policy crises as representing an ideal context in which the nature of this balancing act can be explored. Section 5 of the chapter provides a discussion of the crisis literature and, building on recent scholarship, suggests a re-interpretation of the nature of crisis in which risk and uncertainty play a key role. The chapter concludes with the discussion of the three main research hypotheses that drive the thesis.

The first hypothesis suggests that risk and uncertainty have always played a key role in foreign policy decision-making. The second hypothesis suggests that the shift from a Cold War era of long-term strategies to a post-Cold War era of short-termism and risk-management might be overdrawn. The hypothesis assumes that Presidential decision-making in foreign policy has always been a matter of risk management. The third hypothesis suggests that the outcome of this balancing act is a loss of control over both the international environment and the consequences of one's own action.

In this sense, **Chapter 2** identifies the main target of the research. **Chapter 3** identifies the nature of the inquiry and the context in which the inquiry will be conducted. Before proceeding towards the case studies, **Chapter 4** provides a discussion of the methodology and methods adopted by the thesis. The chapter discusses the interpretive character of the thesis and the connection between a foreign policy decision-making approach and the study of risk. The chapter also provides a discussion of the case study approach and of the rationale behind the cases selected. The methods

section discusses the type of research conducted, the documents and archives consulted, and the type of interviews carried out.

Chapters 5 to 8 contain the case studies. The chapters have a similar structure. The inquiry focuses on the long pre-crisis period as opposed to the crisis management phase on which most studies seem to concentrate. After a general introduction, each chapter discusses the historical background of the case studies and the level of knowledge available to the incoming Administration. The account, then, develops through an analysis of Presidential decision-making. Each decision is discussed in terms of 'risk vs. risk trade-offs.' The analysis identifies the level of uncertainty surrounding the issue, the risks Presidents managed with their decisions, and those they dismissed. The chapters conclude with the emergence of crises.

**Chapter 5** deals with the Kennedy Administration's approach to Cuba. It discusses the uncertain position of the United States in the late 1950s and the emergence of the issue of Cuba. It then follows the evolution of the 'Cuban issue' from an electoral card played by John Kennedy as a Democratic Presidential candidate, to a thorn in the side of the Kennedy Administration. As the focus narrows onto the various trade-offs confronted by President Kennedy, the chapter highlights the short-termism and minimalism of the President's decisions and the consequences of these measures for the Cold War confrontation. In this account, the missile crisis emerges as the by-product of the accumulation of countervailing risks.

**Chapter 6** deals with the Carter Administration's approach to Iran. It opens with a brief overview of the United States' position at the end of the 1970s, and of the Nixon and Ford Administrations' policies towards the Shah and Iran. The chapter, then, moves to a discussion of the risk trade-offs confronted by President Carter as he took office. The chapter discusses how the relations with the Shah threatened key commitments of the Carter Administration including the promotion of human rights and a reduction in arms sales. With Iran in turmoil, the chapter follows the Administration

attempts to come to grips with the Revolution. In particular, the chapter identifies the short-termism of the policies adopted by the White House, the stubbornness in 'sticking with the Shah,' the unwillingness to chart a new course, the inability and unwillingness to open to the opposition, the President's illusion of neutrality in the confrontation between opposition and the Shah, and the US restraint in opening to the new government. In this account, the admission of the Shah and the taking of the hostages represented only the proverbial last straw on the camel's back.

**Chapter 7** starts with the George H. W. Bush Administration's attempt to set a new course for the United States at the end of the Cold War, and with its efforts to set clear guidelines for the use of American power in the new international context. After this overview, the chapter moves towards a study of the Balkan wars, and of Bosnia. Bosnia, not unlike Cuba, features first as a 'card' played by a Democratic Presidential candidate to tarnish the foreign policy reputation of the incumbent Republican Administration. The chapter then follows the incoming Clinton Administration's inability to set a clear course on Bosnia. Focusing on what is generally considered the 'Bosnia containment' phase the chapter exposes the uncertainty and risks inherent in the confrontation in the Balkans. The various trade-offs identify the Administration's inability to manage contrasting risks coming from domestic pressure, strategic concerns, and relations with other great powers. Clinton's minimalism and his tendency to adopt short-term measures to placate domestic criticism - with little regard for international consequences - finally come back to haunt him with the escalation of violence in the summer of 1995.

At the end of the case studies, **Chapter 8** provides a conclusion to the thesis. The Chapter reflects on the research journey. First, it evaluates the performance of the research hypotheses in the case studies. In doing this, it suggests continuities in the practices of US foreign policy decision-making along the Cold War/Post-Cold War divide. Second, the chapter provides a discussion of the main contribution to the research. The chapter concludes

with a section on the possible objections to the thesis and with a brief overview of possible new avenues of research.

## CHAPTER 2: RISK IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

*Don't you understand, what I'm trying to say?  
Can't you see the fear that I'm feeling today?  
If the button is pushed, there's no running away,  
There'll be no one to save with the world in a grave,  
take a look around you, boy, it's bound to scare you, boy.<sup>1</sup>*  
Barry McGuire, *Eve of Destruction*

In 1992, a report from the Royal Society stated that risk had become 'ubiquitous.'<sup>2</sup> If, at the time, the statement appeared excessive, today it is almost an understatement. Although risk has a long story,<sup>3</sup> the explicit definition of more and more aspects of life in terms of risk is a relatively new phenomenon. A *Nexis* search for UK newspaper articles containing the word 'risk' in the headline retrieved only two results between 1970 and 1990; more than 3000 between 1990 and 2012.<sup>4</sup> Today, 'it seems as if we must take a risk-based description of everything.'<sup>5</sup>

Starting in the 1980s, a boom in the risk literature has accompanied the increased attention to risk. Risk has progressively abandoned its 'hard science' origins to enter the world of sociology. In the long aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September the 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, IR scholars developed a strong interest in risk and saw, in the new risks brought about by globalisation and by the end of the Cold War, the key determinant of Western policies. More specifically, two schools; one inspired by Ulrich Beck's theory of the 'risk society,' the other inspired by Michel Foucault's study of security; positioned risk at the centre of a historical divide; of a radical rupture in the

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<sup>1</sup> Barry McGuire, 'Eve of destruction,' writer P. F. Sloan, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hood *et al.*, *Risk: Analysis, Perception and Management* (London: The Royal Society, 1992), p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Bernstein, *Against the Gods: the remarkable story of risk* (London: Wiley, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Search conducted through *LexisNexis*, limited to UK newspapers. [<http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk>].

<sup>5</sup> Michael Power, *Organized Uncertainty Designing a World of Risk Management* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

nature and practice of both domestic and foreign policies. As argued in the **Chapter 1**, the aim of the thesis is to assess the validity and the extent of this divide. The aim of this chapter is to provide the theoretical background to conduct this assessment.

The chapter can be divided into three main parts. After this brief introduction, **Part two** will provide a discussion of sociological approaches to risk and of the post-9/11 risk literature in IR. The analysis will focus on the Beckian and Foucauldian acknowledging key differences, but also identifying common tenets. It will point out the contradictions in these conceptualisations, initiating the search for better definitions. **Part three** will discuss classic understandings of risk in the foreign policy literature, looking at studies interpreting risk from economic or psychological perspectives. It will conclude with the suggestion that both the 'sociological' and the 'decision theory' approach do not provide consistent definitions of risk and uncertainty, nor a realistic portrayal of the role of the decision-maker. This conclusion will pave the way for a reconceptualisation of risk in foreign policy in **Chapter 3**.

## 2.2 RISK IN THE POST-COLD WAR WORLD: FROM SOCIOLOGY TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

A 2008 collection identified five theories of risk in sociology: 'risk and reflexive modernization,' 'governmentality and risk,' 'systems theory and risk,' 'edgework and risk,' 'culture and risk.'<sup>6</sup> Deborah Lupton provided a

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<sup>6</sup> Reflexive modernisation and governmentality are discussed below. Niklas Luhmann discusses risk as a key feature of his 'systems theory' in which social systems are discussed as systems of communication. Niklas Luhmann, *Risk: a sociological theory* (London: Aldine Transactions, 2008). Risk and culture refers to the work of (among others) Mary Douglas who interpreted risk as a cultural construction. See Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame* (London: Routledge, 1994), and Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983). Edgework refers to Stephen Lyng's study of voluntary risk-taking. See Stephen Lyng (Ed.), *Edgework: the sociology of risk-taking* (London: Routledge, 2004). For a



similar division in her seminal work on risk.<sup>7</sup> Ortwin Renn listed seven theories, divided according to their realist or constructivist ontology and their structural or individualist approach.<sup>8</sup> This analysis will not discuss all these theories but only those sociological approaches that have recently inspired IR scholars. Beyond studies trying to distinguish between risk and threat,<sup>9</sup> IR has witnessed a 'boom' in works specifically discussing risk only since 2005. In 2006, eight articles cited other articles within IR journals with 'risk' in their topic. The number has grown steadily, with 539 articles in 2010,<sup>10</sup> when this research started.

Several scholars have tried to bring order to this maze, and two main classifications of theories of risk have been presented. Karen Lund Petersen has suggested that studies of risk can be divided into three macro categories: critical risk studies, focusing on risk governance in the daily practices of government; global risk management studies, aimed at improving decision-making and changing the international environment; and political risk studies, adopting economic and technical approaches.<sup>11</sup> Global risk management studies certainly played a key part within this literature, fostering interdisciplinary efforts aimed at preventing strategic surprise and

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general overview see Jens O. Zinn (Ed.), *Social Theories of Risk and Uncertainty* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Deborah Lupton, *Risk: key ideas* (Routledge, London 1999). Lupton added 'risk and the other,' and 'risk and subjectivity' as separate categories. See also Ortwin Renn, *Risk Governance: coping with uncertainty in a complex world* (London: Routledge/Earthscan, 2008), pp. 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> Ortwin Renn, *Risk Governance: coping with uncertainty in a complex world* (London: Earthscan, 2008), pp. 23-24. Renn added 'social amplification of risk,' 'rational choice,' and 'critical theory' to Zinn's lists and ignored 'edgework.'

<sup>9</sup> Keohane and his colleagues distinguished between risk and threat in two main ways. First, actors who do not have the capabilities to threaten, merely pose risks. Second, risks represent problem within alliances, whereas threats endanger an alliance from the outside. Celeste A. Wallander and Robert O. Keohane, 'Risk, threat, and security institutions,' in Robert O. Keohane, *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized world* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Karen Lund Petersen, 'Risk analysis – a field within Security Studies,' *European Journal of International Relations*, 2013, p. 694.

<sup>11</sup> Petersen, 'Risk analysis.'

catastrophic risks.<sup>12</sup> Petersen's division, however, extends beyond IR to look at economic concepts such as country-specific political risk. William Clapton provided a classification more targeted to the world of IR and a succinct description of the debate:

Critical realists suggest that risks are real and exist 'out there'; constructivists maintain that risks are social constructions and that what matters is how social norms...shape actors' perceptions and responses to risk; and post-structuralist argue that risks are not real, and that representations of risk are actually a method of applying particular governing techniques.<sup>13</sup>

This thesis largely agrees with this division. However, three problems can be identified. First, many of what Clapton calls 'constructivist scholars' do not deal with risk as a specific concept. Risk and threat, as one of them admits, are treated as synonyms.<sup>14</sup> An analysis of risk is not the point in these studies, which focus principally on processes of 'framing,' and of 'threat inflation.'<sup>15</sup> Second, as the analysis will make clear, a rigid division in terms of epistemology and ontology does not reflect many of the authors' positions within the risk literature. The authors' opinions have changed throughout their work, and they often sit uneasily at the crossroads between realism and constructivism. Third, only authors inspired by two sociological approaches the 'reflexive modernization' or 'risk society' school and the 'governmentality' school have laid a precise claim regarding the radical newness of risk and the changes that risk has brought to international

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Bracken, Ian Bremmer, and David Gordon (Eds.), *Managing Strategic Surprise Lessons from Risk Management and Risk Assessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Francis Fukuyama (Ed.), *Blindside: How to Anticipate Forcing Events and Wild Cards in Global Politics* (Baltimore: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), and Nick Bostrom and Milan M. Circovic, *Global catastrophic risks* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> William Clapton, 'Risk in International Relations,' *International relations*, Vol. 25, 2011, p. 281.

<sup>14</sup> Lennart Sjöberg, 'Risk Perceptions: taking on societal salience,' in Johan Eriksson (Ed.), *Threat Politics: new perspectives on security, risks and crisis management* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Johan Eriksson (Ed.), *Threat Politics: new perspectives on security, risks and crisis management* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), and Trevor Thrall and Jane K. Cramer, *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear* (London: Routledge 2009).

politics and foreign policy. For these reasons, this analysis divides scholars discussing risk in IR into two main categories. The first group, inspired by Beck's theory of 'risk society' and, more generally, by works on reflexive modernisation, will be defined as the 'risk society at war' scholarship. The second group, inspired by Foucault's work on security, and by studies on 'governmentality,' will be defined as the 'governmentality at war' scholarship.<sup>16</sup> The analysis will start with a discussion of the sociological theories, and will later focus on their IR re-interpretations.

### **2.2.1 The Power of Risk**

#### *2.2.1.1 From Foucault's 'notion of risk' to governmentality studies*

*The anti-scarcity system is basically focused  
on a possible event that could take place,  
and which one tries to prevent  
before it becomes reality.<sup>17</sup>*  
Michel Foucault.

Foucault never dealt at length with risk. In his 1977-1978 lectures at the Collège de France, the French philosopher delineated the emergence, from the Sixteenth century onwards, of new rationalities of government based on 'security,' as distinct from law or discipline. Whereas law sets clear benchmarks of what is permitted and what is prohibited, representing a 'negative power;' and discipline shapes behaviour, representing positive power; security can be understood as neutral. Security 'stands back sufficiently,' to comprehend reality and to respond to it, possibly using instruments of prohibition (law), and prescription (discipline). This response 'cancels out the reality to which it responds – nullifies it.'<sup>18</sup> Behind an appearance of letting things happen, 'security' implies the management of

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<sup>16</sup> The terms are used to distinguish these new scholarships in IR from previous works inspired by the same sociological approaches. In the rest of the thesis the terms 'Beckian' and 'Foucauldian' will also be used as shortcuts to clarify these scholarships' inspiration.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 33.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *Security*, pp. 45-46.

possible outcomes through prevention and through an effort to eliminate everything that could be aleatory.<sup>19</sup>

The emergence of this new form of government and its diffusion depended largely on the rise of statistics. First, statistics permitted the identification of regularities and dynamics within the population that went beyond the family or the single individual.<sup>20</sup> Second, statistics helped in establishing the 'absolutely crucial notion of risk.'<sup>21</sup> With statistics a case is no longer treated individually, but as part of a category. Establishing what is 'at risk' also defines what is 'normal.'<sup>22</sup> The rise of security and of statistics represented a crucial stage in the evolution of government. Governmental aims evolved from the wealth of the sovereign, to the security of the territory, and finally to the control of the population. In this shift, the population evolved from being an object of repression, to a raw source of power, in mercantilist economies, and finally an object of control. A whole new series of elements became objects of knowledge and control, to form part of the 'rationality of government,' or 'governmentality.' Foucault defined governmentality as an 'ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations and tactics.'<sup>23</sup>

In particular, the governmentality of liberalism aimed at 'standing back sufficiently,' and ensuring free circulation, while at the same time maintaining control and isolating the 'at risk' categories.<sup>24</sup> Foucault elaborated on the inherent contradiction between maintaining freedom and maintaining security. In a second series of lectures, he argued that in liberalism the government is no longer interested in the individual in him/herself, or in the population in itself; but in the 'interests' they carry. For liberalism: 'the problem of security is the protection of the collective

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<sup>19</sup> Nick Butler, 'The management of population,' *Ephemera*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2007), p. 475.

<sup>20</sup> Foucault, *Security*, pp. 100-101.

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, *Security*, p. 61.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *Security*, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault, *Security*, p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *Security*, p. 65.

interest against individual interest.<sup>25</sup> Liberalism cannot deal with interests if it does not manage the interplay of security and freedom, limiting exposure to danger. Freedom in liberalism is not real freedom, but a produced 'good,' constantly manufactured. To guarantee the co-existence of freedom and security, governments spread their instruments of control, justified by the emergence of a new 'education and culture' of danger.<sup>26</sup>

These ideas have formed part of a rich scholarship. In spite of Foucault's warning against an understanding of 'governmentality' as a series of successive and mutually exclusive phases,<sup>27</sup> many scholars have discussed the rise of risk through historical phases. Francois Ewald suggested that the birth of risk could not be understood without referring to insurance as the first explicit attempt to shape future events.<sup>28</sup> Ewald identifies an evolution in the rationality of government from a phase of individual 'responsibility' and prudence (in early liberalism), to a phase of 'solidarity' and prevention in which the welfare state acts as insurer of last resort; and finally a phase of safety and precaution in which risks have become too great to be insured against.<sup>29</sup> Risks have moved towards a double infinity: 'toward the infinitely small-scale' of biological, natural or food-related risks, and toward the 'infinitely large-scale' of the catastrophes they can endanger.<sup>30</sup> Governments, unable to insure against these risks, and unwilling to face

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<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Bio-politics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, *The Birth*, p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> Foucault, *Security*, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Francois Ewald, 'Insurance and Risk' in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 200.

<sup>29</sup> Francois Ewald, 'The return of Descartes's Malicious demon: an outline of a philosophy of precaution,' in Tom Baker and Jonathan Simon (Eds.), *Embracing Risk: the changing culture of insurance and responsibility* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Francois Ewald, 'Two Infinities of Risk,' in Brian Massumi (Ed.), *The Politics of Everyday Fear* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 222.

their catastrophic potential, extend precautionary regulatory measures.<sup>31</sup> In Ewald, risks appear sometimes 'real;' sometimes constructed. 'Nothing is a risk in itself,' he wrote in a much quoted sentence, 'there is no risk in reality. But on the other hand, anything can be a risk.'<sup>32</sup> The predominant account within this scholarship, however, is that of risk as a technology to deal with problems.<sup>33</sup> This analysis has developed at several levels.

Starting at the individual level, a large body of literature has focused on risk as a strategy to regulate the body. Risk, in these accounts, establishes new forms of 'bio-politics' through which 'basic biological features of the human species are turned into objects of political control.'<sup>34</sup> As security becomes redefined as a matter of individual 'new prudentialism,'<sup>35</sup> individual characteristics become governmental concerns. 'Active citizens (capable of managing their own risks)' are now kept separate from the 'at risk' categories that require external intervention.<sup>36</sup> To remain in the first category, individuals need to 'police themselves;' they are obliged to be responsibly free.<sup>37</sup> This analysis of individual behaviour has permitted the study of more general trends in society, relating to crime,<sup>38</sup> madness<sup>39</sup> and medicine.<sup>40</sup> A common theme is the shift from a paradigm of danger to one of risk. With risk, the collection of otherwise unrelated factors leads to the deduction of a definition of danger, thus lowering the threshold for

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<sup>31</sup> Ewald, 'The return.'

<sup>32</sup> Ewald, 'Insurance,' p. 199.

<sup>33</sup> Nikolas Rose, Pat O'Malley and Mariana Valverde, 'Governmentality,' *Annual review of law and social sciences*, Vol. 2 (2006), p. 95.

<sup>34</sup> Foucault, *The Birth*, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Pat O'Malley, 'Risk, Power and crime prevention,' *Economy and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1992), pp. 252-275.

<sup>36</sup> Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: SAGE, 1999), p. 167.

<sup>37</sup> Rose *et al.* 'Governmentality,' p. 91.

<sup>38</sup> Richard V. Ericson and Kevin D. Haggerty, *Policing the Risk society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

<sup>39</sup> Nikolas Rose, 'At risk of madness,' in Baker and Simon, *Embracing*.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Castel, 'From dangerousness to risk,' in Burchell *et al.*, *The Foucault*.

governmental intervention.<sup>41</sup> 'To be suspected, it is no longer necessary to manifest symptoms of dangerousness,' it is sufficient to 'display whatever characteristics' are defined as risky. This power of definition has no limits. 'For what situation is there of which one can be certain that it harbours no risk...?'<sup>42</sup> The spread of risk as a technique, the diffusion of neo-liberal practices of government, and the lowering of threshold for governmental action represent key themes in post-9/11 governmentality studies.

#### 2.2.1.2 A '*dispositif*' of precaution: risk and the War on Terror

Our government has kept us in a perpetual state of fear...with the cry of grave national emergency. Always there has been some terrible evil at home or some monstrous foreign power that was going to gobble us up...Yet, in retrospect, these disasters...seem never to have been quite real.<sup>43</sup>

The quote from General Douglas MacArthur dates back to 1956, and yet it encapsulates the spirit of the 'politics of everyday fear'<sup>44</sup> that, according to the 'governmentality at war' scholarship, rules contemporary Western societies. Like governmentality studies, this scholarship has discussed the policies of the War on Terror both at the 'bio-political' and at the national level, often extending the argument to foreign policy. According to Louise Amoore and Mareike de Goede, the terrorist attacks on 9/11 represented the entry into a new historical and political phase; a paradigm shift. Whereas in previous eras risk had acted as the key instrument to ensure safety and security,<sup>45</sup> after 9/11 governments had to confront the radical unpredictability and uncertainty of terrorism. This 'recognition of

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<sup>41</sup> Castel, 'From dangerousness,' p. 288.

<sup>42</sup> Castel, 'From dangerousness,' p. 289.

<sup>43</sup> Gen. Douglas MacArthur, 'Remarks to stockholders at the Annual Meeting of Sperry Rand Corporation,' 31 July 1956 [[http://www.fee.org/the\\_freeman/detail/the-risk-within#axzz2ZE2yr5ex](http://www.fee.org/the_freeman/detail/the-risk-within#axzz2ZE2yr5ex)] (accessed 16 July 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Brian Massumi, *The Politics of everyday fear* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Louise Amoore and Mareike de Goede, 'Governing by risk in the War on Terror,' in Louise Amoore and Mareike de Goede (Eds.), *Risk and the War on Terror* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 9.

incalculability' did not lead to an acknowledgment of the fragility of life, but to aggressive efforts to pre-empt any possible contingency.<sup>46</sup> The initial failure of imagination - later recognised by the 9/11 Commission as 'a mindset that dismissed possibilities'<sup>47</sup> - spurred an overreaction. The illusion of 'connecting' previously unconnected dots, and of learning the 'lessons' of 9/11 became the impetus for action.<sup>48</sup> The very pervasiveness of threats within media and political debates constituted a governmental strategy, built on 'premediation.' The term can be understood as a way of forecasting.<sup>49</sup> The 'premediation' of possible or even imaginary scary future scenarios enables repressive and preventive actions in the present.<sup>50</sup> The reproduction and re-enactment of 'worst case scenarios' scares the population into obedience.<sup>51</sup>

In this account risk is generally defined as a 'dispositif:' 'a heterogeneous assemblage of discursive and material elements for governing social problems.'<sup>52</sup> This 'dispositif' drives new practices of risk management and of control. Drawing on Ewald, Claudia Aradau and Rens Van Munster suggest that the post-9/11 dispositif is one of 'risk precaution.' On one side, maintaining the rhetoric of 'risk,' the dispositif provides a useful smokescreen (an appearance of manageability). On the other side, the 'precautionary' element, takes advantage of the uncertainty created by the alleged 'double infinity of risks' to extend governments' possibilities of intervention far beyond the presence of real threats.<sup>53</sup> These developments alter the traditional 'calculus' of security. Security policies are now driven

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<sup>46</sup> Amooore and de Goede, 'Governing,' p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *Final Report*, [www.911commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf] (accessed 17 July 2013), p. 336.

<sup>48</sup> Amooore and de Goede, 'Governing,' p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Grusin, 'Premediation,' *Criticism*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (2004), p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> Mareike de Goede, 'Beyond Risk: Premediation and the Post-9/11 Security Imagination,' *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 39, No. 2-3 (2008), p. 159.

<sup>51</sup> Stuart Price, *Worst Case Scenario? Governance, Mediation and the Security Regime* (London: Zed Books, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Claudia Aradau and Rens Van Munster, 'Taming the future: the dispositif of risk in the War on Terror,' in Amooore and De Goede, *Risk*, p. 24.

<sup>53</sup> Aradau and Van Munster, 'Taming,' p. 29.



by hypothesis and suspicion, by 'What if?' questions.<sup>54</sup> If the threat is depicted as 'incalculable, unpredictable but always imminent,' and the outcomes of an attack are depicted as catastrophic, preventive and aggressive measures are the only available solution.<sup>55</sup>

At the 'bio-political' level, individuals are divided along categories of risk. Computer-based screening systems collect heterogeneous characteristics of the whole population to identify 'connections between otherwise insignificant pieces of data' that, in combination, are 'cause for suspicion.'<sup>56</sup> 'Everyone is presumed guilty until the risk profile proves otherwise.'<sup>57</sup> An individual's features become objects of screening.<sup>58</sup> Border controls are devised to keep out the 'at risk,' and to permit the free and fast circulation of those who promote neo-liberal practices and models.<sup>59</sup> Biometrics are used to distinguish between 'authenticated' citizens and the 'others.'<sup>60</sup> Governments rely on private companies and on technologically unprecedented systems to spy on every type of communication, as Edward Snowden's revelations have recently confirmed.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Gabe Mythen and Sandra Walklate, 'Terrorism, Risk and International Security: the Perils of asking "What if?"' *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 39, no. 2-3 (2008), p. 234.

<sup>55</sup> Rosalyn Diprose, *et al.*, 'Governing the future: the Paradigm of Prudence in Political Technologies of Risk Management,' *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 39, no. 2-3 (2008), p. 269.

<sup>56</sup> Amoore and de Goede, 'Governing,' p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Ericson and Haggerty, *Policing*, p. 42.

<sup>58</sup> Louise Amoore, 'Vigilant Visualities: the watchful politics of the War on Terror,' *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (June 2007), pp. 139-156.

<sup>59</sup> Wendy Larner, 'Spatial imaginaries: economic globalization and the War on Terror,' in Amoore and De Goede, *Risk*.

<sup>60</sup> Charlotte Epstein, 'Embodying risk: using biometrics to protect the border,' in Amoore and de Goede, *Risk*.

<sup>61</sup> Ewen MacAskill, 'Edward Snowden: how the spy story of the age leaked out,' *The Guardian*, 12 June 2013 [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jun/11/edward-snowden-nsa-whistleblower-profile>] (accessed 28 August 2013), and Glenn Greenwald, 'NSA whistleblower: "I don't want to live in a society that does these sort of things,"' *The Guardian*, 9 June 2013 [<http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2013/jun/09/nsa-whistleblower-edward-snowden-interview-video>] (accessed 23 September 2013).

For Foucauldian scholars, the justification of these powers becomes clear if one looks at the changes risk brought at the national level. Risk changed the features of sovereignty, security and 'emergency.' The government extends control over previously unregulated sectors through a 'plurality of forces circulating through and under the positional sovereignty of the official arbitrating body.'<sup>62</sup> Sovereignty becomes plural and develops through layers of bureaucratic administrators. As Judith Butler puts it, 'petty sovereigns' proliferate. They are 'institutions mobilized by aims and tactics of power they do not inaugurate or fully control.' And yet, like the sovereign, they act both within and above the law. They partake in the 'prerogative power' of the executive.<sup>63</sup> Mark Neocleous argued that the predominance of emergency represented a traditional feature of liberalism. Liberalism, promoting the myth of a balance between security and liberty, has always opened 'the (back) door to an acceptance of all sorts of authoritarian security measures.'<sup>64</sup> In the Foucauldian scholarship, however, the rise of emergency has been interpreted as a recent phenomenon and has been linked to the rise of contemporary risks and to their unmanageability. Due to the shadowy and 'infinite' nature of risks, governments are always on the attack, trying to prevent them. In doing this, authorities deprive the 'securitization' of an issue of its 'exceptional' character. Exception becomes the rule.<sup>65</sup> Insecurity rather than security becomes the 'normality.'

This conception of security is radically different from others available in IR. First, whereas for critical theorists, security had 'emancipatory effects,'<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 145.

<sup>63</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 56.

<sup>64</sup> Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 5 and 13.

<sup>65</sup> Rens Van Munster, 'Logics of Security: The Copenhagen School, Risk Management and the War on Terror,' *Political Science Publications*, No. 10 (2005), University of Southern Denmark [http://static.sdu.dk/mediafiles/Files/Om\_SDU/Institutter/Statskundskab/Skriftserie/05RVM10.pdf] (accessed 23 September 2013).

<sup>66</sup> Ken Booth, 'Security and Emancipation,' *Review of International Studies*,

security becomes, here, an instrument of repression. Second, whereas security studies and, in particular, the Copenhagen School, identified the presence of an 'existential threat' as a requirement to 'securitize' an issue,<sup>67</sup> precautionary practices of risk management address the potentialities of risk, rather than real threats.<sup>68</sup> Security creates a never-ending 'state of exception' where threats are no longer defined, but nonetheless always imminent.<sup>69</sup> As Slavoj Žižek writes, we have entered 'a time in which a state of peace can at the same time be a state of emergency.'<sup>70</sup> Risk management, like Gilles Deleuze's control, 'is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the same time continuous and unbounded.' It is a form of short-term, continuous domination extending even to speech and imagination.<sup>71</sup>

This governmental control and this constant state of emergency have been duplicated at the international level. The 'welfare state' has turned into a 'warfare state: a permanent state of emergency against a multifarious threat as much in us as outside.'<sup>72</sup> The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the foreign policies of the 'War on Terror' represent the flipside of domestic developments. Amoore and de Goede write:

The preemptive decisions of the battlefield have their echoes in really quite prosaic and everyday domains where action is taken on the basis of anticipation.<sup>73</sup>

A common rhetoric of emergency and war:

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Vol. 17, No. 4 (1991), pp. 313–26.

<sup>67</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: a new framework for Analysis*, (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

<sup>68</sup> Rens Van Munster, 'The War on Terrorism: when the exception becomes the rule,' *International Journal of the Semiotics of Law*, Vol. 17 (2004), p. 147.

<sup>69</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the desert of the real* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 108.

<sup>71</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 181.

<sup>72</sup> Massumi (Ed.), *The Politics*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>73</sup> Amoore and de Goede, 'Governing,' p. 14.

Simultaneously terrorize the American population into the preemptive policies of homeland security, and populations in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East through preemptive attacks.<sup>74</sup>

The logic of pre-emption, intended here as precautionary action in the face of uncertain or even imaginary threats, has a 'self-propelling' effect on government.<sup>75</sup> The 2002 *National Security Strategy*'s call for aggressive pre-emption,<sup>76</sup> and George W. Bush's division of the world in 'us vs. the terrorists'<sup>77</sup> created a situation of perpetual conflict (real or imagined) that justified the presence of forces abroad, and militarism at home. Beyond the rhetoric of risk and precaution that surrounded the Bush Doctrine and the build-up to the 2003 Iraq War, Foucauldian scholars can also rely on more recent developments, such as the Obama Administration's 'signature strikes.' Part of the drone campaign, these strikes target not necessarily terrorist militants, but individuals who appear to behave like one in an insurgent-controlled area.<sup>78</sup> The sovereign (the US government) emerges in foreign policy as strong and in control as it is in the domestic context.

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<sup>74</sup> Larner, 'Spatial,' p. 60.

<sup>75</sup> Brian Massumi, 'Potential Politics and the Primacy of Preemption,' *Theory and Event*, 2007, [[http://muse.jhu.edu.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v010/10.2massumi.html](http://muse.jhu.edu.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/journals/theory_and_event/v010/10.2massumi.html)] (accessed 10 July 2013).

<sup>76</sup> US Government, *National Security Strategy 2002* (September) [<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>] (accessed 5 August 2013).

<sup>77</sup> George W. Bush, 'Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the Nation,' *The Washington Post*, 20 September 2001 [[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress\\_092001.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html)] (accessed 20 September 2013).

<sup>78</sup> Audrey Kurth Cronin, 'Why Drones fail: when tactics drive strategy,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (July/August 2013), p. 47.

## 2.2.2 Welcome to the risk society: reflexive modernity and uncontrollable risks

### 2.2.2.1 Beck's Risk Society: the ageing of modernity

*Progress has turned into a sort of endless and uninterrupted game of musical chairs in which a moment of inattention results in irreversible defeat.*<sup>79</sup>  
Zygmunt Bauman.

'Modernity is ageing:' this is the central tenet of Ulrich Beck's risk society theory. Going beyond the 'modern/post-modern debate,' Beck argues that modernity is not dead; it is simply confronting the consequence of its own evolution.<sup>80</sup> The age we are living in represents the ultimate stage of industrialisation. Progress is taking its toll on humanity.<sup>81</sup> Beck argues that the risk society developed through several historical stages. In the timeline, pre-industrial societies attributed accidents to Gods or to the role of fate. Industrial society, that he also calls the 'reflex stage' of modernity,<sup>82</sup> started to perceive risks, but still considered them manageable. Risk society describes:

A phase of development of modern society in which the social, political, ecological and individual risks created by the momentum of innovation increasingly elude the control and protective institutions of industrial society.<sup>83</sup>

Risks derive from three types of threats: wealth-driven threats coming from technology and science, poverty-driven threats at the crossroads between

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<sup>79</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> Ulrich Beck, Scott Lash, and Anthony Giddens, *Reflexive Modernization: politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1995).

<sup>81</sup> Ulrich Beck, 'World at Risk: the new task of critical theory,' *Development and Society*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (June 2008), p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Ulrich Beck, 'Risk Society and the Provident State,' in Scott Lash, Bronislaw Szerszynski, and Brian Wynne (Eds.), *Risk, Environment and Modernity: towards a new ecology* (London: SAGE, 1996).

<sup>83</sup> Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999), p. 72.

environmental destruction and misery; and the proliferation of WMDs<sup>84</sup> (and terrorism, in Beck's latest works).<sup>85</sup> The unprecedented nature of such risks is guaranteed by their 'de-bounded' nature. They are 'socially de-bounded:' the result of complex processes involving long term effects and catastrophic consequences<sup>86</sup> that deprive social institutions, such as insurance and accountability, of any meaning.<sup>87</sup> They are 'spatially de-bounded:' they 'do not take nation-state boundaries or any other boundaries...into account.'<sup>88</sup> They are 'temporally de-bounded.' The effects of risks are latent, and develop within extremely long time frames.<sup>89</sup>

The emergence of these risks is the key development in the 'risk society,' and yet, it is hard to find, in Beck, a clear definition of risk. Throughout his work, Beck oscillated between realist and constructivist definitions. The book *Risk Society* originated from the concern over real environmental and health risks, such as those posed by the Chernobyl disaster. Beck argued that risks were real and produced by modernisation, but when it came to give a definition, he wrote that risk was not the problem in itself, but 'a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization.'<sup>90</sup> This was reflected in the confusion as to whether 'risk society' meant an increase in the amount and magnitude of risks, or simply an increase in the tendency to interpret problems and dangers in terms of risk. Beck also seemed confused as to the social effects of risks, suggesting first that risks entail new conflicts over definition, creating 'winners and losers' in risks;<sup>91</sup> but later exposing their egalitarian character - smog could strike the rich and the poor with the same

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<sup>84</sup> Beck, *World Risk*, p. 35.

<sup>85</sup> Ulrich Beck, 'The Terrorist Threat. World Risk Society Revisited,' *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2002), pp. 39-55, and Ulrich Beck, *World at Risk* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

<sup>86</sup> Ulrich Beck, 'World at Risk,' p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> Beck, *World Risk*, p. 55.

<sup>88</sup> Mythen and Walklate, 'Terrorism,' p. 224.

<sup>89</sup> Beck, 'World at Risk.'

<sup>90</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: towards a new modernity* (London: SAGE, 1992), p. 21.

<sup>91</sup> Beck, *Risk*, p. 22.

intensity.<sup>92</sup> The situation did not improve with *World Risk Society*, where it became unclear if 'dangers' or 'risks' were the problem.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Beck took a very constructivist position. 'Ultimately,' he wrote, 'it is cultural perception and definition that constitute risk. "Risk" and the "(public) definition of risk" are one and the same.'<sup>94</sup> Beck repeated this definition in his latest works, but here he seemed to achieve an uneasy compromise between constructivist and realist positions, blending constructivist ontology, with realist epistemology. 'Risks,' he wrote, 'do not have any abstract existence in themselves. They acquire reality in the contradictory judgments of groups and populations.'<sup>95</sup>

In this labyrinth, one element seems to remain constant: risks depend on decisions. Like Anthony Giddens, Beck argues that risks depend on the centrality of 'decision' typical of modernity and on processes of 'disembedding' in which 'distant events and actions have a constant effect on our lives, and a constantly increasing one too.'<sup>96</sup> Risks revolutionise time frames, representing an effort to colonise the future, to influence future events with today's decisions:

Risk reverses the relationship of past, present and future. The past loses its power to determine the present. Its place as a cause of present-day experience is taken by the future.<sup>97</sup>

Through actions taken in the present to tame uncertainty, decision-makers create future risks. Risks 'depend on decisions – that is they presuppose decisions.' They 'arise from the transformation of uncertainty and hazards into decisions (and compel the making of decisions, which in turn produce risks).'<sup>98</sup> In this paradox lies the irony of the risk society. In our 'runaway

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<sup>92</sup> Beck, *Risk*, p. 39.

<sup>93</sup> Beck, *World Risk*, p. 36.

<sup>94</sup> Beck, *World Risk*, p. 135.

<sup>95</sup> Beck, *World at Risk*, p. 13.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony Giddens and Christopher Pearson, *A Conversation with Anthony Giddens* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 98.

<sup>97</sup> Beck, *World Risk*, p. 137.

<sup>98</sup> Beck, *World Risk*, p. 75.

world,'<sup>99</sup> we are surrounded by uncertainty and by unpredictable risks, but we still have to decide. We have to control something even though we do not know whether it exists.<sup>100</sup> The consequences of this paradox are enormous. The attempt to 'colonize the future,' to decide even when facing uncertainty unleashes uncontrollable 'boomerang effects.' The production of risks, Beck argues, 'follows a boomerang curve:' risks that were previously considered secondary come back to haunt the centres of decision.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, Beck disagrees with Giddens. Reflexive, for Beck, does not mean subject to 'endless' revision,<sup>102</sup> but self-confrontation. The 'heightening of the intention of control' produces the opposite effect.<sup>103</sup> This condition compels a shift in the purpose of society: whereas industrial society was concerned with the distribution of 'goods,' risk society is concerned with the avoidance of 'bads.'<sup>104</sup> In Beck's analysis, the recognition of these developments should lead to a new 'cosmopolitan era' with forms of transnational politics from above, and of 'sub-politics' from the civil society.<sup>105</sup> In his post-9/11 works, however, he had to recognise: 'the state is back, and for the old Hobbesian reason – the provision of security.'<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Runaway world* (London: Profile Books, 2002).

<sup>100</sup> Beck, 'World at Risk,' p. 6.

<sup>101</sup> Beck, *Risk*, p. 37.

<sup>102</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The consequences of modernity* (Stanford: Polity Press, 1990), p. 39.

<sup>103</sup> Ulrich Beck, 'The Reinvention of Politics: towards a theory of reflexive modernization,' in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash (Eds.), *Reflexive Modernization: politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>104</sup> Beck, *World Risk*, p. 62.

<sup>105</sup> Jens O. Zinn, 'Risk Society and reflexive modernization,' in Zinn, *Social Theories of Risk*.

<sup>106</sup> Beck, 'Terrorist,' p. 47.



### 2.2.2.2 *The Risk Society goes to War*

*Two Nokia mobiles, \$150 each, two HP printers,  
\$300 each, plus shipping,  
transportation and other miscellaneous expenses  
add up to a total bill of \$4,200.  
That is all what [sic] Operation Haemorrhage cost us.<sup>107</sup>*

Since the 'double surprise' of the 2003 Iraq (that Saddam was hiding no WMDs and that the 'Mission Accomplished' celebrations were far too premature) that allegedly exposed the 'irony' of the risk society, several scholars started to interpret the policies of the War on Terror as an effort to manage 'de-bounded' risks. In suggesting the new predominance of risk, scholars could rely on a series of official documents portraying risk as the new key concept in Western security. Since the early 1990s, NATO had started to warn member states that the demise of the Soviet threat did not guarantee security. The 1991 Strategic Concept stated: 'the threat of a simultaneous, full-scale attack on all of NATO's European fronts has effectively been removed.' However, the alliance faced new risks 'multi-faceted in nature and multi-directional,' and, for this reason, difficult to predict.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, the 1999 Concept stated: 'the dangers of the Cold War have given way...to new opportunities and risks.' Due to the appearance of 'complex new risks,' the West's policies should be geared towards early prevention.<sup>109</sup> Authors within this line of scholarship took NATO's and the West's position as their starting point. Two main elements predominate in these works: the portrayal of today's world as one of unprecedented

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<sup>107</sup> Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Yahia Ibrahim, '\$4200,' *Inspire*, Special Issue, 'The Objectives of Operation Haemorrhage,' Vol. 1431 (2010), p. 15 [<http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/testimony/375.pdf>] (accessed 23 September 2013).

<sup>108</sup> NATO, 'The Alliance New Strategic Concept,' 7-8 November 1991, [[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_23847.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23847.htm)] (accessed 18 July 2013), pp. 7-8.

<sup>109</sup> NATO, 'The Alliance Strategic Concept,' 24 April 1999 [[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_27433.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm)] (accessed 18 July 2013), p. 3.

uncertainty and danger, coupled with a nostalgia for the Cold War; and the study of Western policies as practices of risk management.

Today's uncertainty is framed in terms of entrance into a new age. In his *War in an Age of Risk*, Christopher Coker portrays a world in which uncertainty 'is not the outcome of defects in intelligence-gathering,' but depends on the very limits of knowledge. Uncertainty is 'the organising principle of today's disorder.'<sup>110</sup> The point was made famous by former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's distinction between 'known unknowns' – things we don't know but that we could know – and 'unknown unknowns' – things we don't know that we don't know.<sup>111</sup> On this score, Coker compares our uncertain world with the clearer and simpler world of the Cold War. During the Cold War, Coker suggests, the capabilities of the enemy could be assessed through intelligence gathering. 'Intentions too could be assessed with some accuracy by diplomats or academic who visited Moscow.'<sup>112</sup> This is no longer possible; there is no enemy to spy on. Unpredictable risks have filled the gap left by a clearly defined threat. As in Beck, though, it is not clear what risks are. They often appear real. When a definition is provided, however, risk is defined as 'a belief, or attitude, a way of thinking about the world.'<sup>113</sup>

Security, then, is not so much about assessing something that exists, but about anticipating something we do not know. Once again, the Cold War emerges as a clearer age. The risk calculus of the Cold War, Coker writes, 'was part of an instrumental world, a realm that provided clear distinctions between safety and danger.' Today's risks are both unpredictable in the

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<sup>110</sup> Christopher Coker, *War in an Age of Risk* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), p. 148.

<sup>111</sup> Donald Rumsfeld, 'DoD News Briefing, Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers,' 12 February 2002 [<http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2636>] (accessed 23 July 2013), and Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown* (New York: Sentinel, 2011).

<sup>112</sup> Coker, *War*, p. 95.

<sup>113</sup> Coker, *War*, p. 66.

present, and 'associated with the unintended consequences of our own actions.'<sup>114</sup> At the same time, 'we are forced to reflect even more on our circumstances because the cost of getting it wrong has risen so greatly.'<sup>115</sup> Decision-making becomes almost impossible. No wonder that many policies fail. Policies are doomed to failure when consequences can snowball and risks can cascade.

We can take responsibility for the consequences of our actions but we will never know what those consequences are going to be, we can never anticipate all of them, and we can never calculate with any precision, the cost of those that we can.<sup>116</sup>

Hence, Coker concludes, policy makers should abandon grandiose projects of New World Orders, and should settle for a practical, day-to-day management of disorder.<sup>117</sup>

In similar fashion, Mikkel Rasmussen affirmed that following the end of the Cold War, Western societies started to recognise the existence of an 'unpredictable and uncontrollable environment.'<sup>118</sup> This recognition, he suggested, compelled a change in strategy. In a risk environment, strategy means choosing the risks you take before they choose you.<sup>119</sup> Policymakers need to mothball long-term strategies, such as containment and deterrence that guided foreign policy during the Cold War, in favour of short-term management. Whereas strategy used to represent the outcome of linear and rational thinking, security today needs to settle for much less: a 'meteorologist approach.' Meteorology is a 'method for making the unpredictable predictable by creating a scenario for what will happen and giving people the opportunity to act accordingly.'<sup>120</sup> Once again, it is not

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<sup>114</sup> Coker, *War*, p. 69.

<sup>115</sup> Coker, *War*, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> Coker, *War*, p. 130.

<sup>117</sup> Coker, *War*, p. 151.

<sup>118</sup> Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 95.

<sup>119</sup> Rasmussen, *The Risk*, p. 35.

<sup>120</sup> Rasmussen, *The Risk*, p. 98.

clear what risks are. They are defined first as 'a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities,' and later as 'flows,' and a matter of 'political judgment.'<sup>121</sup> What is clear is that they predominate, making our world much more uncertain than the Cold War world, and imposing a shift from long-term strategy to short-term risk management. And it is more; through the adoption of a 'risk framework,' the criteria through which policy choices should be assessed change. Successes are impossible to identify since a risk prevented will never materialise. More importantly, the fact that past 'risk justifications' proved empty should not be a primary concern.<sup>122</sup> The more so, since the outcomes of any decision depend on 'boomerang effects' over which decision-makers lack control.<sup>123</sup>

In Coker and Rasmussen, risk management emerges as the most suitable path to security. Other scholars have dealt with questions of who manages risks and with how risk management affects Western policies. Michael Williams wrote that with the predominance of risks and of practices of risk management,<sup>124</sup> common definitions of risk become the new basis for collective action. NATO turns from an Alliance, into a risk community.<sup>125</sup> Yee-Kuang Heng argues that with the end of the Cold War, new risks, radicalised by globalisation, have changed not only security, but also the nature and practice of war. To build his framework, Heng borrows elements from literatures outside the foreign policy context, and defines risk management as a cyclical process of perception, assessment, action, and communication.<sup>126</sup> In this analysis, risk - defined in terms of probabilities and magnitude of the probable outcome - is clearly interpreted as different from threat, which is defined in term of capabilities and intentions. The

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<sup>121</sup> Rasmussen, *The Risk*, pp. 33 and 114.

<sup>122</sup> Rasmussen, *The Risk*, p. 127.

<sup>123</sup> Rasmussen, *The Risk*, p. 129.

<sup>124</sup> Michael J. Williams, '(In)security Studies: Reflexive Modernization and the Risk Society,' *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 43 No. 1 (2008), p. 58. We will return to this definition.

<sup>125</sup> Michael J. Williams, *NATO, Security and Risk Management* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>126</sup> Yee-Kuang Heng, *War as Risk Management: Strategy and Conflict in an Age of Globalised Risks* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 54.

substitution of threats with risks, Heng affirms, affected recent western military operations (from Kosovo to Iraq) driving every moment of the campaign. The impetus, aims, and conduct of war changed.<sup>127</sup> In Heng's opinion, today's risks revolutionise war and foreign policy. For this reason, a 'new minimalism' should inspire their conduct.<sup>128</sup>

### **2.2.3 The two scholarships reconsidered**

As should be clear from the account above, the Beckian and Foucauldian literatures within IR start from different perspectives, look at different levels of analysis, and have different normative outlooks. Beyond these differences, however, a review of the literature permits the identification of common tenets. Both schools seem to share three main propositions:

1) They identify the existence of a historical divide, and they justify the existence of such divide in terms of a new uncertainty, brought about by the rise of risk.

- Foucauldian scholars generally position the divide with the terrorist attacks of 9/11 when the unpredictability of terrorism pierced through governments' illusion of control,
- For Beckian scholars, 9/11 represented only the latest episode of a longer process started with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The spread of risks substituted the certainty of the Cold War threat.

2) Both schools identify a shift from longer-term practices of security, to short-term, and constantly running practices of risk management.

- For Foucauldian scholars, the new 'double infinity' of risk means that governments are constantly on the move, constantly managing real

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<sup>127</sup> Heng, *War*, p. 58. See also Edward Luttwak, 'Towards post-heroic warfare,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (May/June 1995), pp. 109-120, and Martin Shaw, *The New Western Way of War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

<sup>128</sup> Heng, *War*, p. 59.

or imaginary risks. The mask of risk management permits the continuous promotion of governmental control and of practices aimed at socio-political/neoliberal gains,

- For Beckian scholars, risk reshapes strategy, war, and the practice of foreign policy. During the Cold War, policy-makers could rely on long-term strategies, whereas today they need to adopt a 'fire-fighter' behaviour extinguishing risks before they escalate. Risks are not liable to be eradicated, but, at best, managed. As such, they revolutionise the goals of foreign policy, towards a 'new minimalism.'

3) As should be clear from the two points above, both schools share a radical view of the decision-maker, and of his/her possibilities of control over the external environment and over the consequences of his/her own actions.

- In the Foucauldian scholarship, the government is almost omnipotent, extending governmental control to more and more aspects of society. In this effort, multiple layers of sovereignty and 'petty sovereigns' support the government, sharing its lawless power. This state of exception is as powerful in the domestic context, as it is in the international one, where pre-emptive action imposes control on the external 'other.'
- In the Beckian scholarship, the decision-maker appears almost hopeless. He/She confronts de-bounded risks that he/she is unable to control due to: the radical uncertainty of the environment, the impossibility of controlling the consequences of his/her own actions, and the emergence of unpredictable boomerang effects.

To summarise, the two schools identify the existence of a clear historical divide, originating in the rise of risk and uncertainty, which brings radical changes in the way decision-making, and foreign policy are conducted. As previously stated, the overarching aim of the thesis is to evaluate the extent and nature of this historical divide; to assess whether the nature and

practice of foreign policy decision-making has changed quite so radically between the Cold War and the post-Cold War or post-9/11 world. In the account above, the emergence of risk and uncertainty is presented as the main determinant of the historical and political divide. To assess the existence of such a divide, one has to evaluate the claim that risk and uncertainty represent radically new features of the international context. Before addressing this theme, however, it is necessary to come to grips with what risk and uncertainty are, and with how decision-makers deal with them.

From a review of this literature, two main problems emerge. First, as we have seen, although relying on risk and uncertainty as main justifications, these schools offer vague and often contradictory conceptualisations. In the Beckian scholarship, risks are sometimes real and sometimes constructed. They are defined as the danger itself, as the probability of danger, and as a way to deal with uncertainty and danger.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, it is unclear if the changes in international politics occur because the amount of risk has increased, or because 'strategists' have become more risk-conscious. Uncertainty is described as a brand new phenomenon. Beckian scholars rely on a rough simplification of the Cold War, which appears as a simple 'bean counting' exercise between the superpowers, and as an era of complete certainty and foresight. As Heng puts it, only the 'structural novelty' of today's world, brought about by risks, made knowing the future impossible.<sup>131</sup> Uncertainty seems to depend alternatively on lack of knowledge, on the impossibility of knowing, and on the impossibility of controlling the consequences of one's own actions. Foucauldian scholars oscillate between constructivist and post-structuralist definitions. Risks are sometimes 'mediated' and sometimes defined as 'dispositifs'. In this twist, as a critic has put it, risks lose essence, they become 'unreal,' and turn into

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<sup>130</sup> Scott Campbell and Greg Currie, 'Against Beck: in defence of risk analysis,' *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Volume 36, No. 2 (June 2006), p. 151.

<sup>131</sup> Heng, *War*, p. 50. It is unclear in which past historical era we 'knew' the future.

'empty signifiers.'<sup>132</sup> Uncertainty derives from the 'double infinity' of contemporary risks, and it is carelessly understood as a pretext to extend practices of risk-precaution.<sup>133</sup>

The second problem concerns the understanding of agency. Although the various developments in domestic and international politics are discussed mainly at the structural level, both schools often refer to 'decision-makers,' 'government' and 'strategists.' Neither account goes into much detail in discussing who 'decision-makers' are and what they do. Furthermore, both accounts provide unrealistic portrayals of the 'risk decision-maker,'<sup>134</sup> especially in foreign policy. Before assessing the extent of the historical divide, this analysis will search for a more consistent and precise understanding of risk, uncertainty and of the role and possibilities of the foreign policy decision-maker.

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<sup>132</sup> Clapton, 'Risk,' p. 284.

<sup>133</sup> Tanja Aalberts and Wouter Werner, 'Mobilising uncertainty and the making of responsible sovereign,' *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 37 (2011), pp. 2183-2200.

<sup>134</sup> The definition 'risk decision-maker' was inspired by a study of the 'risk citizen' emerging from sociological interpretations of risk. Sandra Walklate and Gabriel Mythen, 'Agency, reflexivity and risk: cosmopolitan, neurotic of prudential citizen?' *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2010), pp. 46-62.



## 2.3 DECISION THEORY: RISK AND RISK-TAKING IN FOREIGN POLICY

*Decision theory is the theory  
of deciding what to do  
when it is uncertain what will happen.<sup>135</sup>*  
Ian Hacking.

Although the study of risk in international politics is sometimes presented as a new endeavour,<sup>136</sup> several authors have discussed risk and risk-taking to explain how foreign policy decision-makers deal with uncertainty. Most of these scholars relied on understanding risk as probability.<sup>137</sup> However, they also recognised that events in international politics were ‘unique’ and thus beyond statistical analysis. As John Herz wrote, the study of international politics suffered from the exceptionality of its events.<sup>138</sup> The predominance of exceptionality critically affected the efforts to export risk as a purely probabilistic concept in the field of foreign policy. More specifically, the fact that events in international politics are unique and often, necessarily, rare, made these scholars uneasy in the discussion of ‘risk,’ especially since they considered the concept of risk relevant only in cases where a precise calculus of probability is possible and available.<sup>139</sup> Throughout its evolution, this ‘decision theory’ literature has demonstrated an inherent, often ill-concealed conflict. Between the messiness of politics and the clarity of a scientific account, the second has too often prevailed. If the sociological literature discussed the US as primary example of a shift in the practices of foreign policy, several authors within this literature have focused on US foreign policy and on Presidential decision-making.

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<sup>135</sup> Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 62.

<sup>136</sup> Bracken *et al.* (Eds.), *Managing*, p. 1.

<sup>137</sup> Frank Knight defined risk as a situation in which we know the odds. Frank Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Cambridge: Mifflin and Company, 1921). We will return to this definition.

<sup>138</sup> John Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 4.

<sup>139</sup> We will see how this is not necessarily the case.

### 2.3.1 From Bernoulli to Vertzberger

#### 2.3.1.1 Bernoulli meets Allison's Rational Actor Model

In the 1970s, Eugene Alpert suggested that risk could play a part in understanding international behaviour. Like Herz, he recognised that international politics could not be explained in terms of 'frequentist' (that is objective) probability. As he wrote, 'the statement "France will probably go to war tomorrow" appears to be a probability statement but it is very difficult to see how it could describe...frequencies of outcomes of repeated experiment.'<sup>140</sup> He suggested, as alternative, the use of Bayesian probability - that is probability based on a degree of belief.<sup>141</sup> This study, however, focused mainly on uncertainty and the model was applied to a state's perception of other powers' capabilities. Only with Hannes Adomeit risk clearly took the centre stage in international politics.

Acknowledging the difficulty in transferring Knight's risk to international politics, Adomeit wrote: 'When political scientists talk of risk, they have something in mind which is puzzling to an economic theorist: a degree of belief about the likelihood of a catastrophe in the relations among states.'<sup>142</sup> In spite of this concession, Adomeit explained Soviet risk-taking behaviour through Daniel Bernoulli's 'expected utility theory.' According to Bernoulli, the utility of an outcome for each individual, and not its inherent value, determined the choice. Decisions could not be understood without taking into account the 'characteristics of the persons themselves.'<sup>143</sup> Since utility decreases with an increase in the amount of a good possessed, individuals are naturally risk-averse: the more they have the less they are willing to

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<sup>140</sup> Eugene J. Alpert, 'Capabilities, Perceptions, and risks: a Bayesian model of international behavior,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (September 1976), p. 422.

<sup>141</sup> Alpert, 'Capabilities,' p. 422.

<sup>142</sup> Hannes Adomeit, *Soviet Risk-taking and Crisis Behavior* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 17.

<sup>143</sup> Daniel Bernoulli, 'Exposition of a new theory on the measurement of risk,' *Econometrica*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan. 1954), p. 24. Translated by Louise Sommer; original first published in 1738.

risk. In his study, Adomeit defined 'calculated risk-taking,' as the conscious choice among alternatives, and contended that it could be successfully explained by referring to a state's utility function.

In the analysis, two elements stand out. First, whereas, in deterrence theory, the stronger actor might be tempted to attack, here, following Bernoulli, 'the player with the stronger position' will be risk-averse, while the weaker will take higher risks in a desperate effort to turn the tide.<sup>144</sup> Second, Adomeit's most controversial hypothesis stated that a player's risk-taking propensity influenced its risk-taking.<sup>145</sup> Adomeit openly acknowledged that such a hypothesis approached a truism, but dismissed any need for further explanation. If a state's risk-taking propensities are understood as the product of a single utility function, that state needs to speak with one voice. The state must be interpreted as a unitary actor. 'The most appropriate research procedure for the analysis of risk-taking behaviour,' Adomeit accordingly wrote, 'appears to be the consideration of a nation's behaviour in terms of a rational actor model.'<sup>146</sup> In doing so, he did not ignore the effects of other variables such as human weaknesses, organisational constraints or domestic politics, but simply discounted their role. For organisations to work, he wrote, 'someone had to give the orders.'<sup>147</sup> Similarly, although 'bureaucratic politics' and human weaknesses could influence decision-making processes, countermeasures taken during international crises compensated for 'irrational elements.'<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Adomeit, *Soviet*, p. 18.

<sup>145</sup> Adomeit, *Soviet*, p. 23.

<sup>146</sup> Adomeit, *Soviet*, p. 38.

<sup>147</sup> Adomeit, *Soviet*, p. 35.

<sup>148</sup> Adomeit, *Soviet*, p. 48.

### 2.3.2.2 Prospect Theory's reality check

*The failure of the rational model is not in its logic  
but in the human brain it requires.*<sup>149</sup>

Daniel Kahneman

Adomeit's model was based on the assumptions that Bernoulli's 'expected utility theory' closely approached human and, as an extension, state behaviour. Prospect Theory (PT) questioned Bernoulli's assumptions. Scholars such as Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, and Paul Slovic redefined the understanding of decision-making under uncertainty. According to these scholars, the decision process developed in two main phases. In the first part, which they labelled 'judgment under uncertainty', 'heuristics' or rules of thumb, such as 'illusion of validity,' 'availability,' and 'anchoring'<sup>150</sup> are used to model uncertainty. The establishment of 'frames' also helps in simplifying the decision task, categorising 'outcomes in terms of gains and losses.'<sup>151</sup> Heuristics and framing strategies are successful in modelling uncertainty, in reducing the complexity of 'probability assessments' and in partially easing decisional stress;<sup>152</sup> still, they are far from inconsequential. In this process, 'certain prospects become labelled as potential options while others are disregarded from consideration.'<sup>153</sup>

In the second part, once uncertainty has been reduced and the problem framed, decision-makers start to evaluate the remaining alternatives.<sup>154</sup> In contrast with previous theories, the selection of an option does not depend on value or utility, but on a decision-maker's 'domain.'<sup>155</sup> The 'domain' is

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<sup>149</sup> Bernstein, *Against*, p. 284.

<sup>150</sup> Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky, *Judgment under Uncertainty: heuristics and biases* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (London: Penguin Books, 2011).

<sup>151</sup> Rose McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1998), p. 22-24.

<sup>152</sup> Kahneman *et al.*, *Judgment*, p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> McDermott, *Risk-Taking*, p. 25.

<sup>154</sup> McDermott, *Risk-Taking*, p. 5.

<sup>155</sup> McDermott, *Risk-Taking*, pp. 28-29.

established by comparing the situation at hand with a 'reference point' - 'a state to which one has adapted' - influenced by variables such as social norms, expectations and aspiration.<sup>156</sup> Decision-makers will adopt a risk-averse behaviour if they perceive it to be in a domain of gains - that is when things are going well - and a risk-seeking one in a domain of losses. Furthermore, individuals demonstrate a relative 'loss aversion', that is 'losing hurts more than comparable gains.'<sup>157</sup>

Many scholars have built on PT to interpret foreign policy decision-making. Most of these studies have focused on US Presidents and on Presidential decision-making in foreign policy. In Rose McDermott's study, a decision maker's status quo represents his reference point. Using the 'domain' as explanatory variable, McDermott suggests that it is possible to ignore other dimensions such as individual characteristics. McDermott defines risk as 'relative variance in outcome.'<sup>158</sup> The evaluation of outcome variance, that is the 'riskiness' of a choice, depends on the characteristics of the domain. In particular, 'U-turns' such as that of President Carter on the admission of the Shah in New York, and high risk-taking such as Carter's decision to go ahead with the hostage rescue mission, are explained as a change of domain from one of perceived gains to one of perceived losses.<sup>159</sup> In PT's favour, decision-makers' perceptions are certainly crucial, 'loss-aversion' is a common and intuitive phenomenon, and the focus on the domain permits simplification of the explanation of foreign policy. Furthermore, PT seems to offer acceptable explanations for dynamics of commitment and entrapment. In domains of losses, policymakers might be willing to take increased risks in a

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<sup>156</sup> Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, 'The framing of decision and the psychology of choice,' *Science*, Vol. 211, No. 4481 (1981), p. 456.

<sup>157</sup> McDermott, *Risk-Taking*, p. 29.

<sup>158</sup> McDermott, *Risk-Taking*, p. 39.

<sup>159</sup> McDermott, *Risk-Taking*, and Rose McDermott, 'Prospect Theory and International Relations: The Iranian Hostage rescue Mission,' *Political Psychology*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 1992), pp. 237-263.

desperate effort to decisively turn the tide, but ending up knee-deep in quagmires.<sup>160</sup>

Although convincing at a first look, three main charges can be levied against PT. First, as Jack Levy suggests, in the account, decision-makers' risk-propensity seems to depend on a 'regret' for a lost status quo. There is, in other words, a 'premium' on the status quo.<sup>161</sup> Second, it is difficult to discern what 'status quo' means: 'In some cases, the reference point is not the status quo, but something better. The gap between this desired state of affairs and the current one can lead to high risk-taking.'<sup>162</sup> Third, there are problems in the translation of PT's original laboratory setting into foreign policy decision-making. PT findings are based on individual subjects and explicit, structured decisions, with no stress or tension involved. In these examples, 'the original formulation...leaves no room for further editing,' and 'the edited prospects can be specified without ambiguity.'<sup>163</sup> This is abysmally different from what foreign policy decision-makers face.

For this reason, several scholars have maintained the core assumptions of PT but have added other theoretical insights. Jeffrey Taliaferro has coupled defensive realism and loss aversion to explain great powers' intervention in the periphery.<sup>164</sup> Williams Boettcher III has included PT in his 'risk explanation framework.' The framework aimed at explaining Presidential risk-taking in US foreign policy building on individual variables. Starting from Knight, like many others, Boettcher argued that the concepts of risk and uncertainty have too often been modelled according to the needs of the

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<sup>160</sup> Barry M. Staw, 'Knee-deep in the Big Muddy,' *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, Vol. 16 (1979), pp. 27-44.

<sup>161</sup> Jack S. Levy, 'Loss aversion, Framing, and Bargaining,' *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Apr. 1992), pp. 179-195.

<sup>162</sup> Robert Jervis, 'Political Implications of loss aversion,' *Political Psychology*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 1992), p. 196.

<sup>163</sup> Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, 'Prospect Theory: an analysis of decision-making under risk,' *Econometrica*, Vol. 47, 1979, p. 275.

<sup>164</sup> Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

field to which they have been applied.<sup>165</sup> Foreign policy decision-making occurs, in his opinion, in a condition of 'subjective risk under uncertainty.' Policymakers face a situation in which 'the complete set of potential outcomes...and outcome probabilities are not fully known,' and this forces them to 'develop subjective estimates of potential outcomes, the value of those outcomes, and the probabilities associated with the occurrence of those outcomes.'<sup>166</sup> As in McDermott, 'riskier choice' means one with more numerous and more divergent possible outcomes.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, Boettcher acknowledges that status quo means different things to different people. In his framework, a US President's personality becomes the main driver of foreign policy choice. Using Margaret Hermann's study of personality-at-a-distance<sup>168</sup> and building on Lola Lopes' 'aspiration level,'<sup>169</sup> he hypothesises that if a President's main motivation is 'security,' he will base estimates on worst-case scenarios and losses. This will lead to risk-aversion. If, conversely, a President is driven by 'potential,' he will see gains and best-case scenarios, leading to risk-seeking behaviour.

This model successfully deflects some of the attacks on PT, and correctly positions the President at the helm of foreign policy. However, the abysmal difference between the messiness of political decisions and the aseptic nature of prospect theory remains.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, too narrow a focus on psychology leads to a dismissal of the role of politics and political variables.<sup>171</sup> Ignoring such criticisms, Boettcher identifies the presence of a

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<sup>165</sup> William Boettcher III, *Presidential Risk Behavior in Foreign Policy: Prudence or Peril* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 17.

<sup>166</sup> Boettcher III, *Presidential*, p. 19.

<sup>167</sup> Boettcher III, *Presidential*, p. 20.

<sup>168</sup> Margaret G. Hermann, 'Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior using the personal characteristics of political leaders,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 27 (1980), pp. 7-46.

<sup>169</sup> Lola Lopes and Gregg C. Oden, 'The role of aspiration level in risky choice,' *Journal of Mathematical Psychology*, Vol. 43 (1999), pp. 286-313.

<sup>170</sup> Jack S. Levy, 'Prospect Theory and International Relations: Theoretical applications and analytical problems,' *Political Psychology*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 1992), pp. 283-310.

<sup>171</sup> Jervis, 'Political.'

realm of relative freedom in which a President can decide unimpeded by domestic or international pressures.<sup>172</sup>

### 2.3.2.3 Vertzberger's 'convergent synergism'

In an effort to duplicate the complexity of international politics, some authors have tried to bring together insights from several theories. Yaacov Vertzberger expanded his work on decision-making<sup>173</sup> to look at how US Presidents and policymakers perceive risks. Risk, Vertzberger wrote, is a far more complex concept than most of the studies acknowledge. In his definition risk is:

The likelihood that validly predictable, direct and indirect consequences, with potentially adverse values, will materialize arising from particular events, self-behavior, environmental constraints, or the reaction of an opponent or third party.<sup>174</sup>

Although probability still seems to play a major role in the definition, Vertzberger also added that different types of risk exist. A 'real risk' out there, a 'perceived risk,' depending on decision-makers' perceptions, and an 'acceptable risk,' a level set by the decision-makers according to the context in which they act.<sup>175</sup> To understand which risks are accepted in foreign policy decision-making, Vertzberger suggested the use of a 'socio-cognitive approach.' This framework includes: individual level variables such as cognitive and emotional biases;<sup>176</sup> social-level variables such as group dynamics,<sup>177</sup> and cultural-level variables<sup>178</sup> affecting the perception of

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<sup>172</sup> Boettcher III, *Presidential*, p. 2.

<sup>173</sup> Yaacov Vertzberger, *The World in their Minds*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>174</sup> Yaakov Vertzberger, *Risk Taking and Decisionmaking: Foreign Military Intervention decisions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 22.

<sup>175</sup> Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, p. 17.

<sup>176</sup> Ellen Langer, 'The Illusion of control,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1975), pp. 311-328; and Irving L. Janis and Leon Mann, *Decision-making* (New York: Free press, 1977).

<sup>177</sup> Dorwin Cartwright, 'Risk taking by individuals and groups,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 361-378; and Paul 't



risk.<sup>179</sup> Vertzberger suggests that several, often contradictory, elements influence risk-taking. Pushed and pulled, decision-makers rarely make a decision with the clarity suggested by the rational actor model.<sup>180</sup> Decisions are taken in a piecemeal fashion. 'Decision-makers contemplate, hesitate, anticipate, rethink and change their minds.' The final decision is the product of 'convergence' and 'synergism;' the accumulated effect of several variables.<sup>181</sup>

In spite of an admirable depth, however, Vertzberger's account is not faultless. First, in his analysis, the 'convergent synergism' seems to fade away, substituted by an interpretation of decisions as a 'once-and-for-all' event. No concern is shown for the choices and actions that brought decision-makers to the point where they had to accept or avoid risks. Second, these decisions are, somewhat unconvincingly, divided into 'high risk' or 'low to moderate risk', as though their outcomes were known at the very beginning and decision-makers could measure their actions accordingly. Whereas this is tenable for decisions such as the US intervention in Grenada or Panama, an account in the same terms of US involvement in Vietnam seems more problematic.

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Hart, *Groupthink in Government* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

<sup>178</sup> Douglas and Wildavsky, *Risk*; and Aaron Wildavsky and Karl Dake, 'Theories of Risk Perception,' *Daedalus*, Vol. 119, No. 4 (Fall), pp. 41-60.

<sup>179</sup> Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, p. 8.

<sup>180</sup> Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, p. 109.

<sup>181</sup> Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, p. 394.

## 2.4 AN INTERIM REPORT CARD

*If war were arithmetic,  
the mathematicians would rule the world.*<sup>182</sup>

**Part two** concluded by identifying key tenets and weaknesses of the sociological approaches to risk. The review of the literature above aimed at assessing whether ‘decision theory’ provided a more consistent and, ultimately, more convincing, interpretation of risk in foreign policy, and of the role of decision-makers. The report card, however, is quite bleak. Not only does this literature share some of the weaknesses of the sociological approach, but it also presents problems of its own. First, as in the sociological literature, it is almost impossible to find a univocal definition of risk. Some scholars define risk in terms of probabilities, others in terms of variance in outcomes. Second, striving for a scientific outlook, these scholars have reified risk. Risk is too often used as an ‘external substance, an entity with a location and quantity,’ that decision makers are free to take or avoid.<sup>183</sup> The presence of a real and constant risk out there, feasible as it might be in a laboratory setting, seems less plausible in the world of international politics.<sup>184</sup> A third problem is the dismissal of domestic politics and of domestic political variables; key factors in how states and decision-makers manage risks.

Adomeit dismissed the role of politics since the introduction of petty politicking would not have improved the strength of the analysis.<sup>185</sup> McDermott similarly remarked that preferences and values are constructed within the domain, and not elicited by political developments.<sup>186</sup> Boettcher dismissed ‘domestic politics’ arguing that Presidential decisions were often

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<sup>182</sup> Lord Baelish, *Game of Thrones*, Season 2, Episode 4.

<sup>183</sup> Barry O'Neill, ‘Risk Aversion in International Relations Theory,’ *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (2001), p. 636.

<sup>184</sup> Eldar Shafir, ‘Prospect Theory and political analysis: a psychological perspective,’ *Political Psychology*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1992), pp. 311-322.

<sup>185</sup> Adomeit, *Soviet*.

<sup>186</sup> McDermott, *Risk-Taking*, p. 185.

‘made with little public or congressional involvement,’ and that Presidents often perceived and enjoyed ‘a relatively open decision space.’<sup>187</sup> Even Vertzberger, in his ‘convergent synergism,’ identified the role of politics and domestic factors as variables affecting the perception and ‘acceptability’ of an external risk, rather than as powerful forces of their own.<sup>188</sup> In this sense, if the decision-maker of the sociological literature appeared either too powerful or too weak, the decision-maker emerging from this literature appears too aseptic. As Mary Douglas wrote, in this literature:

Humans are presented...as hedonic calculators...We are said to be risk-averse, but, alas, so inefficient in handling information that we are unintentional risk-takers; basically we are fools.<sup>189</sup>

In particular, studies of US foreign policy often identify the President as the ‘ultimate’ decision-maker, but he emerges as largely unconcerned by developments around him, unimpaired in his ability to make decisions, free to follow his personal risk propensity in taking or avoiding clear and predetermined risks, and sometimes able to perfectly assess those risks in advance. The review of the ‘decision theory’ literature has not improved our understanding of risk and uncertainty, of the role they play in foreign policy, and of the predicament of the foreign policy decision-maker. For this reason, the analysis will now move towards a reconceptualisation.

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<sup>187</sup> Boettcher III, *Presidential*, p. 2.

<sup>188</sup> Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*.

<sup>189</sup> Douglas, *Risk*, p. 13.

## CHAPTER 3: RE-CONCEPTUALISING RISK IN FOREIGN POLICY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter started with an analysis of the sociological risk literature and discussed the main claims authors within these schools make. In particular, it focused on their account of the rise of risk, of the ensuing unprecedented level of uncertainty, and of the changes these developments brought to the nature and practice of foreign policy. Sceptical of this portrayal of decision-making and of the conceptualisations of risk and uncertainty provided in the literature, the chapter started a search for better interpretations. This search ended inconclusively, largely bogged down in the too aseptic accounts of various decision theory authors. The aim of this chapter is to continue this search, and to provide a reconceptualisation of risk and uncertainty, and of the role these concepts play in foreign policy decision-making. In achieving this aim, the analysis will also provide a better portrayal of who the 'decision-makers' are; of their role; and of the extent to which they control the environment in which they act and the consequences of their own actions.

**Part two** of the chapter will discuss foreign policy decision-making texts and will identify hints as to the role of risk, uncertainty and risk management in foreign policy. Following in the path of the sociological and decision theory literatures, the analysis will concentrate on the activity of US Presidents and their inner circle. **Part three** will provide operational definitions of risk, uncertainty and risk management relying on seminal works on risk and uncertainty, and on more recent risk management literature. With a clear set of definitions, **Part four** will proceed to establish a connection between the two worlds, suggesting an interpretation of US Presidential decision-making as a particular form of risk management. **Part five** will suggest that the study of foreign policy crises represents a suitable area to explore these issues. It will discuss the literature on crises, and provide an alternative interpretation of crises as long-term processes emerging from the mismanagement of risks. **Part six** will conclude the

chapter specifying the research hypotheses that will drive the analysis in the case studies.

## **3.2 RISK, UNCERTAINTY AND RISK MANAGEMENT: A FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVE**

### **3.2.1 Schelling's uncertain competition in risk-taking**

Uncertainty has been interpreted as the main determinant of the Cold War/Post-Cold War divide. Despite suggesting entrance into an 'age of risk,' many 'sociological risk' scholars point to uncertainty as the overarching feature of the contemporary international context. The recent discussion of uncertainty unveils several flaws. At the theoretical level, the claim to novelty seems quite weak. As Brian Rathbun put it, the 'force of uncertainty is central to every major research tradition in the study of IR.'<sup>1</sup> More specifically, on 'uncertainty as lack of information,' the argument is fascinatingly simple. The presence of the Soviet Union guaranteed the possibility of assessing capabilities and intentions, filling informational gaps. Its absence today impedes such an assessment; hence the predominance of uncertainty. The point is surprising since, discussing Iraq, Coker states that 'there is only so much the world can know about what a secretive regime chooses to spend its money on.'<sup>2</sup> If this assessment applies to Iraq, it is unclear why it should not have applied to the Soviet Union. Moreover, even if this argument could be right in suggesting that Soviet capabilities could be (and sometimes were) known,<sup>3</sup> the analysis goes awry when intentions are brought into the picture. This is both intuitive - if intentions could be known, one is left to wonder why there was a Cold War

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Rathbun, 'Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the multiple meanings of a crucial concept in International Relations Theory,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (2007), p. 533.

<sup>2</sup> Coker, *War*, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> Even this concession is quite generous, as recent revelations on the Cuban Missile Crisis and on Soviet chemical and biological arsenals have made clear. See Michael Dobbs, *One minute to midnight* (Vintage: London, 2009), and David Hoffman, *The Dead Hand* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009).

in the first place - and demonstrated by several strands of literature, such as the study of the 'security dilemma.' Although disagreeing on its origins, John Herz and Herbert Butterfield – the fathers of the 'security dilemma' - agreed that the 'dilemma' represented a 'fundamental human predicament.'<sup>4</sup> More recently, Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler have confirmed uncertainty and the impossibility of knowing as key features of international politics.<sup>5</sup> The Cold War security dilemma, recently portrayed as an idyllic condition, was more realistically a kingdom of fear and uncertainty:

Everything was uncertain. Who was responsible for 'pushing the button'? Could people 'trust' machines and supercomputers not to malfunction? How real was the Soviet threat? Were entire populations being manipulated? Would a nuclear war be as bad as 'they' say – and who exactly were 'they'?<sup>6</sup>

As Sherman Kent - the first to distinguish between 'known unknowns' and 'unknown unknowns' - put it in the 1960s, in 'a world of closed covenants secretly arrived at, of national business conducted behind the walls of all but impenetrable security, of skilfully planned deceptions,' evidence is not always available. All decision-makers can rely on is the knowledge that an event is 'neither certain to happen nor is its happening an impossibility.'<sup>7</sup>

On uncertainty as 'impossibility of knowing,' and uncertainty as lack of control, the sociological arguments seem equally wanting. Decision-makers have always confronted situations in which issues are knowable, and others in which estimates must be based on 'something that no man alive can

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<sup>4</sup> See John Herz, 'Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma,' *World Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (January 1950), pp. 157-180; and Herbert Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London: Collins, 1951), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Fear: a cultural History* (London: Virago Press, 2006), p. 285.

<sup>7</sup> Sherman Kent, 'Words of Estimative probability,' *Studies in Intelligence*, Fall 1964 [<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/sherman-kent-and-the-board-of-national-estimates-collected-essays/6words.html>] (accessed 30 July 2013).

know.’<sup>8</sup> To be sure, during the Cold War, the presence of the Soviet Union meant that there was an enemy to spy on. The problems of foreign policy decision-makers, however, were not limited to assessing Soviet capabilities and intentions, surprises and unknowns could come from several quarters. Furthermore, as Gary Sick wrote in his study of the Iranian Revolution, although foreign policy events develop largely as a chess game, the possibility of hurricanes swiping away the game and its rules always looms large.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, the study of foreign policy has always included the possibility of loss of control.

Thomas Schelling was the first to identify the interplay between risk, uncertainty and loss of control. His *Arms and Influence* is generally remembered for the description of the superpower confrontation as a competition in risk-taking.<sup>10</sup> Schelling, however, recognised the bounded nature of such competition. He understood war and international politics as a realm of confusion, uncertainty and high unpredictability, originating in the fallibility of human beings and in the imperfection of their governments.<sup>11</sup>

Not everybody is always in his right mind. Not all the frontiers and thresholds are precisely defined...and known to be so beyond the least temptation to test them out.<sup>12</sup>

Uncertainty normally envelops decision-making, and enveloped the superpower confrontation. ‘The fact of uncertainty – the sheer unpredictability of dangerous events,’ Schelling wrote, ‘not only blurs things, it changes their character.’<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in his discussion of brinkmanship, Schelling warned that the ‘brink’ was not an easily controllable area. ‘Neither the person standing there nor onlookers can be

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<sup>8</sup> Kent, ‘Words.’

<sup>9</sup> Gary Sick, *All Fall Down* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), pp. 45-46.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (London: Yale University Press, 2008 [1966]), p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> Schelling, *Arms*, p. 93.

<sup>12</sup> Schelling, *Arms*, p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> Schelling, *Arms*, p. 94.

quite sure just how great the risk is...Brinkmanship involves getting onto the slope where one may fall in spite of his own best efforts.'<sup>14</sup> In this sense, uncertainty is both present, as impossibility of knowing; and future as impossibility of controlling the consequences of one's own action.

Uncertainty changes the rules of the game in unpredictable ways. Such is the context in which decision-makers are called to perform. Knowledge, as Roger Hilsman wrote at the end of his experience in the Kennedy Administration, is always 'inadequate.' Inadequacy comes not only from the difficulty in comprehending 'how and why things work in the social affairs of men,' but also from limited capacity 'to foresee developments that bring problems,' and to 'predict the consequences of whatever action we take.' Furthermore, Hilsman added, the problem is not simply one of lack of information, 'more and better understanding will not always necessarily lead to sure solutions to knotty problems.' The inadequacy of knowledge also increased with the complexity of foreign affairs where problems are always 'new.'<sup>15</sup> In spite of their lack of understanding, in spite of their inability to predict the consequences of their own actions, decision-makers are still compelled to act.

### **3.2.2 Neustadt's 'fire-fighter' behaviour: risk management and Presidential decision-making**

Beyond uncertainty, the second tenet of the sociological scholarship was the shift from long-term strategies such as 'containment,' to short-term practices of risk management. Once again, however, a quick look at the literature suggests that several scholars had already identified the difficulties and often the impossibility of long-term strategies. Some had proved sceptical about the possibility of setting policies. As Charles Burton Marshall caustically put it, 'ultimate purposes' and good wishes 'relate to

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (London: Harvard University Press, 1980 [1960]), pp. 200-201.

<sup>15</sup> Roger Hilsman, *To move a nation* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1967), pp. 11-12.



foreign policy as cheer-leading to quarter-backing or as the sum of man's New Year's resolutions to his biography.<sup>16</sup> Although we like to assume, Hilsman wrote, 'that what we call "decisions" of government are in fact decisions – discrete acts, with recognizable beginnings and sharp, decisive endings;' it does not mean that it is true.<sup>17</sup> The flow of foreign policy decisions and events, Frederick Northedge suggested, is more like gardening 'in which luck and the chances of favourable weather play their part,' than like a 'process of manufacturing...which extends in direct line from drawing board to retail shop.'<sup>18</sup> In foreign policy, 'we must never overlook the force of the unpredictable...the play of the contingent and the unforeseen.' A 'perverse logic' drives foreign policy, he cautioned; 'the tendency for situations to arise that were not only not anticipated, but which states devote their best efforts to avert.'<sup>19</sup> Such an account is remarkably similar to both Beck's description of 'boomerang effects,' and Rasmussen's discussion of strategy as 'meteorology.' However, if we move to the analysis to US foreign policy and to US Presidents as most of the risk literature does, Richard Neustadt's study of Presidential power is key in understanding a President's predicament.

Neustadt established the notion of a President's 'power to persuade,' but his analysis went further. Neustadt suggested that for a President to be effective, he needed to 'guard his power prospects in the course of making choices.'<sup>20</sup> What 'prospects' meant was later explained. For 'each choice that comes his way' a President needed the 'ability to recognize the preconditions and the chance advantages.'<sup>21</sup> A President's 'prospects'

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<sup>16</sup> Charles B. Marshall, *The Limits of Foreign Policy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1954), p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> Hilsman, *To move*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Frederick S. Northedge, 'The Nature of Foreign Policy,' in Frederick S. Northedge (Ed.), *The Foreign Policies of the Powers* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Northedge, 'The Nature,' p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential power and the Modern Presidents: the Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: The Free Press, 1990 [1960]), p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Neustadt, *Presidential*, p. 49.

depended on his ability to balance different domestic constituencies against international concerns. These posed competing challenges through which a President needed to develop 'leeway.' This space of manoeuvre had to be built in the domestic context, with the accumulation of political capital, if foreign policy choices were to be accepted. Foreign policy choices, on the other hand, could impinge on a President's domestic priorities.<sup>22</sup> Neustadt recognised that Presidents were not free to set their own agenda; deadlines and events did that. All a President could do was to 'try to stop fires.'<sup>23</sup> Describing Johnson's Vietnam decisions, Neustadt suggested that the former President was caught in a balancing act between short-term and longer-term risks. In such a balancing act, the 'short-run tangibles' tended to overshadow long-run risks, but such a narrow focus was not inconsequential. First, a short-term approach obscured longer-term risks. The latter, as Neustadt adds begrudgingly, were scarcely seen at all due to 'arrogance or ignorance, suspiciousness or fear, or all of these until too late.'<sup>24</sup> Second, even a focus on more tangible targets was far from guaranteeing control; it represented a 'gamble.' The choices made in the present and their future consequences unpredictably affect not only present chances, but also future prospects. 'What Presidents do every single day,' then, is:

Make decisions that are mostly thrust upon them, the deadlines all too often outside their control, on options mostly framed by others, about issues crammed with technical complexities and uncertain outcomes.<sup>25</sup>

But still, they have to decide. Beyond Neustadt, the President has often been portrayed as being pulled by several forces on both the domestic and the international side. The 'bureaucratic politics' approach to foreign policy has also shed light on this issue. Morton Halperin, at the forefront of this

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<sup>22</sup> See also James A. Nathan and James K. Oliver, 'Bureaucratic Politics: academic windfalls and Intellectual pitfalls,' *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Vol. 6 (Spring 1978), p. 83.

<sup>23</sup> Neustadt, *Presidential*, p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> Neustadt, *Presidential*, p. 212.

<sup>25</sup> Neustadt, *Presidential*, p. 209.

scholarship, wrote that ‘many issues’ come to the President ‘at once and from different directions and...many pressures are involved.’ In his analysis, this led the President to short-term, ‘uncommitted thinking’ that could leave options open.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Fen Hampson has suggested that each decision represents more the ‘vector sum’ of these forces, than the outcome of a President’s will.<sup>27</sup> Bruce Russett has portrayed the President as imprisoned in a ‘triangle of forces’ composed by the public, Washington’s bureaucracy and the world. For this reason, he has suggested, an effective foreign policy depends on a President’s understanding of such a triangle and its needs.<sup>28</sup> Even George Edwards III, a leading scholar of the Presidency, who disagrees with Neustadt’s ‘power to persuade’ thesis, describes Presidential decision-making as a short-term endeavour; more a matter of exploiting existing options, than of setting a long-term agenda.<sup>29</sup> Foreign policy decision-making, it seems, has always been an uncertain, complex, and short-term process. The key point is the idea of ‘chance advantage;’ the fact that Presidents act to manage potential future consequences.<sup>30</sup>

### **3.2.3 Lamborn and George: risks and trade-offs**

From this account, foreign policy decision-making emerges as a ‘bounded’ balancing act between domestic and international dimensions. In a somewhat neglected work, Alan Lamborn provided a description of what this balancing act entailed. He suggested that to make foreign policy choices, decision-makers have to pay a price: they need to build and maintain a

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<sup>26</sup> Morton Halperin (with Priscilla A. Clapp and Arnold Kanter), *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), p. 83.

<sup>27</sup> Fen O. Hampson, ‘The Divided Decision-maker: American Domestic Politics and the Cuban Crises,’ *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Winter 1984), pp. 130-165.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce Russett, *Controlling the Sword: The Democratic governance of National Security* (London, Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> George C. Edwards III, *The Strategic President* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Knecht, ‘Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: the Stages of Presidential decision making,’ *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (2006), pp. 705-727.

domestic coalition that supports their choice.<sup>31</sup> To express the whimsical and unstable nature of this power, Lamborn suggested that it could be understood in terms of 'risk.' More specifically, Lamborn wrote that risk represented the link between the domestic and international context of foreign policy.<sup>32</sup> For every decision policymakers face two types of risk: a 'policy risk' - the probability that policy goals will not be achieved - and a 'political risk' - the probability that policy choices will have adverse consequences on the political position of the decision-maker. He added that policy risks could be sub-divided into two components. 'Intrinsic risks' are the risks inherent in the policy chosen, that is, the risk that the policy will fail even if carried out effectively. 'Extrinsic risks' encompass the risk that the policy won't be politically sustained long enough.<sup>33</sup>

Starting from these assumptions, Lamborn tested a series of hypotheses and concluded that foreign policy decisions could not be understood without taking into account both political risks and policy risks. In particular, he affirmed that the higher the political risks, the higher the 'probability that policymakers will - in an effort to reduce those political risks - be willing to adopt policy alternatives that have higher policy risks.'<sup>34</sup> That is, policymakers are willing to accept 'suboptimal policies' that are riskier at the international level, if they believe those policies might help in lowering expected adverse political consequences. In a sort of vicious cycle, increased political risks lead to an increase in suboptimal policies and, hence, in an increase in intrinsic risk. Furthermore, he suggested, considerations of short-term political risks, influence foreign policy choice, since, in the trade-off, policymakers balance known political risks with possible policy effects. They put, so to say, a dangerous premium on certainty.<sup>35</sup> Lamborn analysed the foreign policies of European powers, but his portrayal of the European

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<sup>31</sup> Alan Lamborn, *The Price of Power* (London: Unwin Lyman, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Lamborn, *The Price*, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Alan Lamborn, 'Risk and Foreign Policy Choice,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (December 1985), p. 387.

<sup>34</sup> Lamborn, 'Risk,' p. 387.

<sup>35</sup> Lamborn, 'Risk,' p. 392.

decision-maker is not too dissimilar from Neustadt's discussion of US Presidents. In line with Neustadt, Lamborn's decision-makers need to gather a constituency behind their decision. In this effort, the probability of something going wrong in terms of political 'short-run tangibles,' makes policymakers more willing to gamble on riskier policies.

Vertzberger acknowledged Lamborn's work, but dismissed it as another example of 'the primacy of domestic politics.'<sup>36</sup> What Lamborn suggests is subtler. None of the two dimensions enjoys a primacy over the other. There is a 'contingent relationship between political and strategic variables.'<sup>37</sup> Being contingent there is no reason to expect one of the two 'to provide, in isolation, an adequate explanation of foreign policy choice.'<sup>38</sup> As in Robert Putnam's 'two-level' game,<sup>39</sup> political and policy risks are intertwined, and both play a part in the outcomes of decision. Each move affects both sectors simultaneously; it is a trade-off. Presidents can choose to manage policy risks or political risks, but not both, not at the same time.

Alexander George's study of Presidential decision-making confirmed the point. Beyond his discussion of cognitive factors, George described Presidential decision-making as a 'trade-off' bounded by uncertainty. In his discussion, he provided a three-dimensional trade-off, between 'need for acceptability, consensus and support,' 'search for high quality decisions,' and 'prudent management of time and other policymaking resources.'<sup>40</sup> As Neustadt would caution, however, under the pressure of strategic and

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<sup>36</sup> Vertzberger, *Risk Taking*, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Robert G. Kaufman, 'Book review: Alan Lamborn and Stephen Mumme, *Statecraft, Domestic Politics, and Foreign Policy Making: The El Chamizal Dispute*,' *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (1989), p. 792.

<sup>38</sup> Alan Lamborn and Stephen Mumme, *Statecraft, Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy making: the El Chamizal Dispute* (London, Westview Press, 1989), p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,' *International Organization*, Vol. 42 (Summer 1988), pp. 427-460.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in foreign policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), p. 2.

political concerns, high quality often becomes a luxury that Presidents cannot afford.

At the end of this detour, Presidential decision-making in foreign policy emerges as a series of uncertain trade-offs between risks in the policy dimension, and risks in the domestic political dimension. These trade-offs leave open the possibility of improving the quality of decisions, but also the chance of loss of control. Most of the key concepts of the sociological literature - uncertainty, risk, and risk management - are clearly embedded in this discussion.

### **3.3 UNCERTAINTY, RISK, AND RISK MANAGEMENT: A NEW PERSPECTIVE**

#### **3.3.1 Towards operational definitions**

The purpose of this section is to provide definitions of these concepts. The author is aware that these definitions will not be 'the last word' on the topic. The 'definitional' effort is not undertaken in the hope that these definitions will gather universal consensus. It is guided by different aims. These definitions will try to bring a certain level of 'simplicity' to the debate, eschewing both the complexity of many 'decision theory' definitions, and 'postmodern' tendencies to make sweeping and hardly defensible claims, or to give a word whatever meaning we want it to have.<sup>41</sup> The definitions will work as 'foundation stones,'<sup>42</sup> setting markers for what is meant by the various terms, within the boundaries of this research project.

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<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Shackel defines these two 'postmodern tactics' as the 'motte and bailey,' and the 'Humpty Dumpty' tactic. See Nicholas Shackel, 'The vacuity of postmodernist methodology,' *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (April 2005), pp. 295-320.

<sup>42</sup> Yee-Kuang Heng, *War as Risk Management: Strategy and Conflict in an Age of Globalised Risks* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 44.

### 3.3.1.1 Knight and Keynes: risk, uncertainty, and that 'awkward fact'

Several scholars within the risk literature started their discussion of risk from the economist Frank Knight's seminal distinction between risk and uncertainty. In his *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit*, Knight defined risk as a situation of objective probability, in which the distribution of outcomes is known; a situation in which we know the odds. Uncertainty, on the contrary, represented a situation in which we do not even know the odds.<sup>43</sup> Many have concluded, that since most real-life decisions are a matter of uncertainty, risk has no role to play. Similarly, scholars within 'decision theory' had troubles translating risk into a relevant foreign policy variable since foreign policy decision-making, at face value, does not rely on a series of statistical probabilities. To the previous point, however, Knight added that: 'when an individual instance only is at issue, there is no difference for conduct between a measurable risk and an unmeasurable uncertainty.' Confronted with this type of problem the individual 'throws his estimate of the value of an opinion into the probability form...and "feels" toward it as toward any probability situation.'<sup>44</sup> And he concluded: 'all decisions as to conduct in real life rest upon opinions which on scrutiny easily resolve themselves into an opinion of a probability.'<sup>45</sup> On this point, John Maynard Keynes concurred with Knight. According to Keynes, uncertainty, a situation in which 'there is no scientific basis on which to form any calculable probability whatever' - in which 'we simply do not know' - formed the basis of everyday experience. Nevertheless, he added that the 'necessity for action and for decision' compelled decision-makers to:

Overlook this awkward fact and to behave exactly as we should if we had behind us a good Benthamite calculation of a series of

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<sup>43</sup> Frank Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Cambridge: Mifflin and Company, 1921), p. 233.

<sup>44</sup> Knight, *Risk*, p. 234.

<sup>45</sup> Knight, *Risk*, p. 237.

prospective advantages and disadvantages, each multiplied by its appropriate probability, waiting to be summed.<sup>46</sup>

That is, as if they could act in terms of risk. In other words, uncertainty is the predominant condition of mankind, but when it comes to making choices, individuals treat uncertainty as if it was risk. This, however, is far from guaranteeing control. As David Jarvis has recently argued, for Knight:

What we know with some degree of certainty is mostly unimportant...This quota of knowledge is...necessary, but marginal. The larger and thus more significant quota of knowledge rests in the realm of uncertainty.<sup>47</sup>

Beyond individuals' possibilities of managing uncertainty through risk, an irreducible kernel of uncertainty remains, suggesting scepticism towards any effort of prediction and control.<sup>48</sup> 'Agential interpretations of, and reactions to, uncertainty,' in Knight's account,

Combined with the myriad ways individuals seek to interface with future situations before they materialize in order to alter the circumstances that obtain, were altogether too complex a set of phenomena and too contingent...to be reduced to accurate calculation.<sup>49</sup>

In this sense, uncertainty represents the overarching condition. It comes from lack of knowledge, from the impossibility of knowing, and from lack of control over the consequences of one's own actions. Risks are defined by probability, and come into play when individuals are confronted with decisions (an argument not too dissimilar from that found in the sociological literature).

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<sup>46</sup> John Maynard Keynes, 'The General Theory of Employment,' *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (February 1937), pp. 213-214.

<sup>47</sup> David S. L. Jarvis, 'Theorising Risk and uncertainty in International Relations: the contribution of Frank Knight,' *International Relations*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (2011), p. 306.

<sup>48</sup> Sanjay G. Reddy, 'Claims to expert knowledge and the subversion of democracy: the triumph of risk over uncertainty,' *Economy and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (May 1996), p. 227.

<sup>49</sup> Jarvis, 'Theorising,' p. 305.



### 3.3.1.2 *Uncertainty, risk, and risk management: the risk management perspective*

More recent studies of uncertainty, risk and risk management have maintained some of these insights. There is widespread agreement that uncertainty represents a fundamental human condition;<sup>50</sup> the 'basic condition of human knowledge.'<sup>51</sup> The understanding of risk, however, has evolved from Knight's definition. Risk remains a highly contested concept even in the risk management literature.<sup>52</sup> In spite of the literature's richness, three main features seem to enjoy a relative consensus. First, risks depend on decisions: they take shape in the 'distinction between possible and chosen action,' in the contingency of choice.<sup>53</sup> They lie between the extremes of 'perfect ignorance' - in which every choice would be random - and perfect knowledge - in which decisions would be perfectly predictable.<sup>54</sup> As Michael Power recently put it, 'uncertainties become risks when they enter into management systems,' when they become objects of decision.<sup>55</sup> Second, as discussed above, risks are a matter of probability.<sup>56</sup> Third, risks are a specific type of probability: a probability of something negative. Knight acknowledged that, in everyday language, risk meant the probability of something negative, but ignored this point.<sup>57</sup> Today, however,

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<sup>50</sup> See Douglas Hubbard, *The failure of risk management: why it's broken and how to fix it* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Richard V. Ericson, 'Ten uncertainties of risk management approaches to security,' *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, Volume 48, No. 3 (June 2006), p. 346.

<sup>52</sup> Power, *Organized*.

<sup>53</sup> Ortwin Renn, *Risk Governance Coping with Uncertainty in a Complex World* (London: Routledge/Earthscan 2008), p.1.

<sup>54</sup> Alfred A. Marcus, 'Risk, Uncertainty and Scientific Judgment,' *Minerva*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1988), p. 141.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Power, *Organized Uncertainty Designing a World of Risk Management* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Hood and David K. C. Jones (Eds.), *Accidents and design: contemporary debates in risk management* (London: Routledge 2003), pp. 2-3.

<sup>57</sup> Knight, *Risk*, p. 233.

there has been a shift from risk as 'chance' to risk as 'danger.'<sup>58</sup> As Douglas Hubbard wrote, risk today refers to 'the probability and magnitude of a loss, disaster, or other undesirable event;' or, more succinctly, to the fact that 'something bad could happen.'<sup>59</sup> Most scholars within the sociological and the 'decision theory' literatures share this 'negative' understanding of risk. Crucially, risk is not the 'negative thing' in itself, nor a technology to deal with the negative thing, but the probability of a negative thing, coupled with the magnitude of the negative outcome's impact. To sum up, we finally have two operational definitions:

**i) Uncertainty** is an overarching condition. It comes from lack of knowledge or information, from the impossibility of knowing, and from the lack of control over the consequences of one's own action;

**ii) Risk** is the probability of something going wrong coupled with the magnitude of the negative outcome. Risks depend on the contingency of decision.

To be sure, this categorisation could appear as a simplification. In both natural and social sciences, several scholars have provided more complex distinctions, describing several types of knowledge and, hence, going beyond risk and uncertainty. Some authors have subdivided risks according to the amount of uncertainty they entail and to their potential impact.<sup>60</sup> Andreas Klinke and Owtwin Renn relied on Greek mythology to classify risks according to probability and catastrophic potential. As an example 'Sword of Damocles' risks have low probability with high potential damage.<sup>61</sup> Other scholars have identified additional categories depending on

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<sup>58</sup> Mary Douglas, 'Risk as a forensic resource,' *Daedalus*, Vol. 119, No. 4 (Fall, 1990), pp. 1-16.

<sup>59</sup> Hubbard, *The failure*, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Jerome R. Ravetz, 'Post-normal science and the complexity of transitions towards sustainability,' *Ecological Complexity*, Vol. 3 (2006), pp. 275-284.

<sup>61</sup> Andreas Klinke and Ortwin Renn, 'A new approach to risk evaluation and management: risk-based, precaution-based, and discourse-bases strategies,' *Risk Analysis*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (2002), p. 1080.

what we know and on whether we can know. In 1992, Brian Wynne provided one of the most influential classifications identifying risk as a situation in which we know the odds; uncertainty as a situation in which we don't know the odds, but we know the main parameters; ignorance as a situation in which we don't even know what we don't know; and indeterminacy as a situation in which causal chains or networks are completely open.<sup>62</sup>

In IR, similar divisions received particular attention in the aftermath of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's 'unknown unknowns' remarks.<sup>63</sup> Christopher Daase and Oliver Kessler suggested the addition of a fourth category. Beyond 'known knowns,' 'known unknowns,' and 'unknown unknowns,' the authors brought forward the concept of 'unknown knowns' that is things we know but we don't want to know.<sup>64</sup> In particular, they classified knowledge on the basis of ontology (what we know) and 'methodology' (how can we know). They used this classification to describe different forms of danger in international politics. In their matrix, K-Ks represented a situation in which we know and we have means to know; a situation of threat. K-Us represented conditions in which we don't know what is out there but we have means to know. They called this condition 'risk.' U-Ks represented conditions of ignorance in which we refuse to know what we know. Finally, U-Us, in which we don't know what we don't know, represented a situation of looming disaster.<sup>65</sup> The authors, then, went on to identify international politics example for their categories: deterrence exemplified a case of threat, terrorism of risk, nuclear terrorism of disaster. The argument was also repeated in a second article in which the authors

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<sup>62</sup> Brian Wynne, 'Uncertainty and environmental learning,' *Global Environmental Change*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1992), p. 114.

<sup>63</sup> Donald Rumsfeld, 'DoD News Briefing, Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers,' 12 February 2002 [<http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2636>] (accessed 23 July 2013).

<sup>64</sup> Christopher Daase and Oliver Kessler, 'Knowns and unknowns in the "War on terror:" uncertainty and the political construction of danger,' *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 38 (2007), p. 412.

<sup>65</sup> Daase and Kessler, 'Knowns and unknowns,' p. 415.

suggested that the Cold War represented a security dilemma and a realm of threats, whereas the post-9/11 world represents a 'security paradox,' in which unknown unknowns predominate and measure to increase knowledge do not necessarily increase security (an argument similar to that made by Coker and Rasmussen).<sup>66</sup>

As a recent scholarship on risk suggests, however, there are problems with these classifications. Hauke Riesch writes that, according to Wynne, indeterminacy includes 'the various social contingencies that are not usually captured in conventional risk assessments,' but there is no specification of what these contingencies are. More generally, it is difficult to discern where the boundaries between the various categories lie.<sup>67</sup> The problem is only exacerbated if the focus shifts to international politics. In particular, it is difficult to see how foreign policy decision-makers could precisely draw boundaries between the various types of unknowns. First, at the moment of decision, whether uncertainty comes from lack of knowledge or impossibility of knowing is, as we have seen, largely inconsequential. Rarely Presidents enjoy the luxury of time to acquire additional information. Second, it is unlikely that problems in international politics only present one type of 'lack of knowledge.' Deterrence, categorised by Kessler and Daase, as a situation of 'known known,' included both 'known unknowns,' and 'unknown unknowns.' Finally, as Schelling suggested, uncertainty represents not only a lack of knowledge, but also a lack of control on the external environment and an impossibility of knowing the consequences of one's own actions. Uncertainty is not only a passive element, external to the decision-context, but an active concern within it. As we have seen discussing Knight, beyond our lack of knowledge a 'kernel' of uncertainty remains. 'We have to accept the fact of uncertainty and learn to live with it,' Roberta

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<sup>66</sup> Christopher Daase and Oliver Kessler, 'From Insecurity to Uncertainty: Risk and the Paradox of Security Politics,' *Alternatives*, Vol. 33 (2008), pp. 211-232.

<sup>67</sup> Hauke Riesch, 'Levels of Uncertainty,' in Sabine Roeser, Rafaela Hillerbrand, Per Sandin and Martin Peterson (Eds.) *Essentials of Risk Theory* (New York: Springer, 2013), p. 33. Quite ironically, Riesch proceeded to provide his own classification of levels of uncertainty.

Wohlstetter wrote at the high noon of the Cold War. 'No magic...provide[s] certainty. Our plans must work without it.'<sup>68</sup> For these reasons, the classification provided here only distinguishes between two dimensions: risk (taking into account probability, outcome, and decision), and uncertainty (including both the various types of lack of knowledge and lack of control).

Moving forward, definitions of risk management abound within the literature. As with risk and uncertainty, however, it is possible to identify some common tenets. First, risk management is a cyclical process. Scholars disagree on the name and number of phases, but they agree that a tendency continuously to go back to reassess the same problem is inherent in risk management. Heng, for example, identifies four main phases: identification of risks, assessment of risks, tackling of risks, review and report.<sup>69</sup> Hubbard settles on five: identify risks, assess risks, identify risk mitigation approaches, assess expected risk reduction, and select and implement mitigation methods.<sup>70</sup> Christopher Hood and David Jones identify five as well: hazard identification, risk assessment, policy decision, policy implementation and policy evaluation.<sup>71</sup> This cyclical nature means that instead of an official closure of the process, there are continuous practices of re-evaluation and surveillance.<sup>72</sup> Second, and connected to the first element, risk management is guided by a 'minimalist ethos.' The ultimate aim is to contain risks. There is a recognition of the limits of action;<sup>73</sup> a 'continuous striving to reduce the level of risk to a point where it is held to be "tolerable."' <sup>74</sup> The aim is not to eradicate the risk at its source, but to make risks acceptable. Fourth, risk management is necessarily proactive. It deals with the future probability of negative events. However, proactive does not

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<sup>68</sup> Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: warning and decision* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 401.

<sup>69</sup> Heng, *War*, p. 54.

<sup>70</sup> Hubbard, *The Failure*, p. 30.

<sup>71</sup> Hood and Jones, *Accidents*, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Heng, *War*, p. 55.

<sup>73</sup> Heng, *War*, p. 59.

<sup>74</sup> Hood and Jones, *Accidents*, p. 7.

necessarily mean precautionary (as Heng would have it).<sup>75</sup> Finally, risk management entails the recognition that resources are scarce, and need to be measured with attention. Decision-makers are called to 'minimize risk in some area...relative to the opportunities being sought, given resource constraints.'<sup>76</sup> More succinctly, risk management entails: 'using what you have to get what you need.'<sup>77</sup> Having identified these four main tenets, we can now provide a definition of risk management.

**Risk management:** the cyclical identification, assessment and prioritisation of risks followed by application of resources to minimise and control the probability and impact of a negative outcome.<sup>78</sup>

Risk management represents a way to prevent future negative outcomes, a way of being smart when taking chances. In this sense, it could be argued that risk management, even 'formalised risk management,' has been around forever, even if the term risk management has not.<sup>79</sup> This definition, however, seems to entail that risk management is a fairly straightforward process and that, above all, decision-makers can take into account one risk at a time and devise strategies to manage it.

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<sup>75</sup> For a succinct discussion see Jonathan B. Wiener, 'Precaution in a Multi-Risk World,' in Dennis Paustenbach (Ed.), *Human and Ecological Risk Assessment: Theory and Practice* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002). For a distinction between proactive and precautionary action see Craig McLean, Alan Patterson and John Williams, 'Risk Assessment, Policy-Making and the Limits of Knowledge: the precautionary principle and International Relations,' *International Relations*, Vol. 23 No. 4 (2009), pp. 548-566.

<sup>76</sup> Hubbard, *The failure*, p. 10.

<sup>77</sup> Hubbard, *The failure*, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> This definition is an elaboration of the one provided by Hubbard. Hubbard, *The failure*, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Hubbard, *The Failure*, p. 22, and Theodore J. Lowi, 'Risks and Rights in the History of American Governments,' *Daedalus*, Vol. 119, No. 4 (Fall, 1990), pp. 17-40.

### 3.4 ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTION

#### 3.4.1 Presidential decision-making and 'risk vs. risk trade-offs'

*An act...gives birth not only to an effect,  
but to a series of effects.  
Of these effects, the first only is immediate...it is seen.  
The others unfold in succession.  
They are not seen.<sup>80</sup>  
Frederic Bastiat.*

In the field of risk and risk management, several scholars have pointed out that risks come from different directions, and that the management of risks in one sector can 'blindsided' decision-makers in another. Risk management is a game much more complex than a single 'cycle.' John Adams discussed at length cognitive factors and the tendency of individuals to react to increased safety with increased risk-taking.<sup>81</sup> In his definition, risk is more like a 'thermostat' in which risk reduction, often leads to 'risk compensation.'<sup>82</sup> Other scholars have suggested that an increase in risks can come from the very efforts of control. John Graham and Jonathan Wiener suggested that every effort to manage a risk could entail the creation of additional unexpected risks.<sup>83</sup> In their definition the risk managed is the 'target risk,' the risks involuntarily created are the 'countervailing risks.' Crucially, 'countervailing risks' are not 'opportunity costs (what Bastiat referred to with 'that which is not seen') but additional unpredictable or unexpected risks. And it is more, the greater the effort to control, the likelier the emergence of countervailing risks. 'As we try to squeeze out more and more risk, the pressure leading to side effects may grow.' Inevitably, the tendency to manage ever-smaller target risks increases the importance of countervailing risks, relative to the benefit from the management of the

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<sup>80</sup> Frederic Bastiat, *That Which is Seen, and That Which is Not Seen*, 1850 [<http://bastiat.org/en/twisatwins.html>] (accessed 25 July 2013).

<sup>81</sup> The use of seatbelts and the increase in reckless diving was one of Adams' main examples.

<sup>82</sup> John Adams, *Risk* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> John Graham and Jonathan Wiener, *Risk vs. Risk* (London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. vi.

target risk<sup>84</sup> (something that could go a long way in explaining the rise in 'boomerang effects' in increasingly risk-averse Western societies). Risk management is not a single cycle, but a continuous trade-off. Risk decisions are taken along a 'Risk Protection Frontier' (similar to the production possibilities frontier in economics) in which more and more efforts to reduce a target risk means that larger increases in countervailing risks must be tolerated.<sup>85</sup>

The selection of the 'point' in the curve at which the trade-off occurs depends on the decision-maker's predicament.<sup>86</sup> But two main factors make this selection complex. First, several risks and several trade-offs impinge on the same decision. Second, the increase in countervailing risks is not straightforward; it is a matter of probability and uncertainty. In the framework, uncertainty plays a role, but the trade-offs selected and the decisions made represent the 'crucial issue.'<sup>87</sup>

The decisionmaker being urged to think about...risk consequences is not being asked to do the impossible, to know what cannot be known or to foresee the unforeseeable. There is certainly a difference between unintended consequences and unforeseeable consequences. The former category encompasses many countervailing risks which might have been considered in the effort to reduce the target risk, but which were either ignored or considered and dismissed.<sup>88</sup>

As in George's trade-off, decision-makers have the possibility of improving the quality of their decisions through additional information and additional resources. Graham and Wiener call this option a 'risk superior move.'<sup>89</sup> However, like George and Neustadt, they conclude that these moves occur far too rarely. They write that risk trade-offs 'are prevalent not because of an inescapable law of risk homeostasis,' as Adams or Beck would have it, 'but because of systematic shortcomings in the ways in which decisions are

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<sup>84</sup> Graham and Wiener, *Risk vs. Risk*, p. 12.

<sup>85</sup> Graham and Wiener, *Risk vs. Risk*, p. 28.

<sup>86</sup> Graham and Wiener, *Risk vs. Risk*, p. 29.

<sup>87</sup> Wiener, 'Precaution in a multirisk,' p. 1519.

<sup>88</sup> Graham and Wiener, *Risk vs. Risk*, p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Graham and Wiener, *Risk vs. Risk*, p. 37.



considered and structured.’<sup>90</sup> The challenge is to consider the full set of risk consequences. Otherwise, a policy might actually accomplish its target goal, but ‘inadvertently or predictably’ cause another failure.<sup>91</sup> From Graham and Wiener’s account, decision-makers emerge as pulled by several forces, and constrained by several types of pressure. They appear as limited in their possibilities of control and too often ready to dismiss countervailing and long-term risks. They appear as the foreign policy decision-making literature had portrayed them. This analysis will use a modified version of Graham and Wiener’s framework as a lens to look at Presidential decision-making.

The argument suggested here is simple: if we abandon the generalisations of the sociological literature, and we start looking at the day to day practice of foreign policy decision-making, not only will risk and uncertainty emerge as key variables, but decision-makers will confront them through short-term practices of risk management. More specifically, as in Graham and Wiener, the analysis will keep uncertainty as the overarching condition of decision-making, but will focus on the risk trade-offs. US Presidents and their inner circle will be the main actors under the spotlight. Recognising the role of Presidents as ultimate foreign policy decision-makers, the project will look at the risks they have faced. For each decision, it will identify the ‘target’ risks managed, and the ‘countervailing’ risks ignored or dismissed. Building on Lamborn, the analysis will divide the risks faced by Presidents into two main categories: domestic political risks and strategic international risks. Domestic political risks include Lamborn’s political risk and ‘extrinsic’ policy risks. They represent both the probability that the policy chosen will have adverse consequences for the domestic position of the President and the probability that the policy chosen might be opposed domestically. Strategic risks represent the risks inherent in the policy chosen, and the probability of its failure at the international level, even if carried out appropriately. Finally, the analysis will try to discuss how and

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<sup>90</sup> Graham and Wiener, *Risk vs. Risk*, p. 226.

<sup>91</sup> Graham and Wiener, *Risk vs. Risk*, p. 229.

with what results Presidents managed these two dimensions. Before proceeding to explicitly spell out the research hypotheses driving the thesis, it is necessary to discuss the context in which the thesis will develop.

### 3.5 COUNTERVAILING RISKS, UNCERTAINTY AND FOREIGN POLICY CRISES

*There is no longer any such thing as strategy, only crisis management.*<sup>92</sup>  
Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, 1963.

*In the end we lucked out. It was luck that prevented nuclear war.*<sup>93</sup>  
Former Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, 2004.

The study of foreign policy crises is the object of a rich and ever-expanding literature. The fascination with crises, as many scholars point out, is justified by their being something ‘exceptional,’ distinct from ‘business as usual.’<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, in the context of international politics, crises have been generally understood as the ‘finest’ moments of decision-makers’ political life. Crises ‘distil’ elements that make up the essence of politics.<sup>95</sup> They represent an ‘international politics microcosm’ in which crucial features of politics such as power, resolve, bargaining, and risk are forced to surface.<sup>96</sup> Crises represent important events and for this very reason deserve inclusion in research projects.<sup>97</sup> Paradoxically, this popularity has

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<sup>92</sup> Michael Dobbs, ‘Myths of the Missile Crisis,’ *Today*, BBC Radio 4, Transcript [[http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_7492000/7492678.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_7492000/7492678.stm)] (accessed 22 September 2013).

<sup>93</sup> Robert McNamara, in Errol Morris, *The Fog of War*, Movie Transcript [[http://www.errolmorris.com/film/fow\\_transcript.html](http://www.errolmorris.com/film/fow_transcript.html)] (accessed 22 September 2013).

<sup>94</sup> Eric K. Stern, *Crisis Decisionmaking: a cognitive institutional approach* (Stockholm, Swedish National Defence College, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, ‘Crisis bargaining,’ in Charles F. Hermann (Ed.), *International Crises: Insights from behavioural research* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), p. 217.

<sup>97</sup> Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Enquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 4.

limited the breadth of the study of crises in two main ways. First, the proliferation of studies has prevented a comprehensive account of what crises are. Studies have often become bogged down in endless definitional debates. Second, since the very moment of crisis is considered as 'the finest,' most studies focus on the process of crisis management and resolution,<sup>98</sup> with relatively less attention devoted to how crises originate. Only recently has an academic re-discovery of crises suggested that, beyond definitional debates and beyond crisis management, it is the nature of crises that needs to be rethought.

### **3.5.1 The crisis literature**

#### *3.5.1.1 The heated debate: lost in definitions*

David Singer famously wrote that, whether a scholar selects for his analysis a macro or micro level is largely a matter of methodological and conceptual convenience. 'Yet the choice often turns out to be quite difficult, and may well become a central issue within the discipline concerned.'<sup>99</sup> Certainly, the choice of the level of analysis has been crucial for the 'crisis literature.' Most studies, in fact, present a common structure. They elaborate a definition depending on the selected level of analysis; the definition is later compared with other, obviously weaker, definitions, and is finally tested, either through quantitative or qualitative methods.

Charles Hermann, a leading scholar in the field, followed Singer in suggesting three main approaches to crises: a systemic approach, a bargaining approach, and a decision-making approach.<sup>100</sup> Some have added a fourth approach: the 'political symbolic approach,' in which the focus is on the manipulations of symbols and on the distortion of crisis

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<sup>98</sup> James Richardson, *Crisis diplomacy : the great powers since the mid-nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge studies in International Relations, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> David Singer, 'The level of Analysis problem in International Relations,' *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (October 1961), p. 77.

<sup>100</sup> Hermann, *International Crises*.

communication.<sup>101</sup> It is, however, at the three main levels Hermann identified that most of the literature has developed. At a systemic level, crises are generally considered as conditions disrupting the international system. They do not necessarily lead to its transformation but have the 'potential' to do so.<sup>102</sup> 'The concept,' as Coral Bell famously put it, 'is of normal strain rising to the level of breaking strain.'<sup>103</sup> Starting from systemic assumptions, Charles McClelland explained that a crisis 'temporarily narrows the focus of international politics, stressing the interaction between actors,' and making the identification of 'exchanges' easier.<sup>104</sup> In his analysis, the use of a 'system interaction framework,' and the 'coding' of these exchanges permitted the identification of events that preceded crises, and hence, their prevention.<sup>105</sup>

At a lower level of analysis - although the stated purpose of *Conflict among Nations* is to bridge the gap between the levels - Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing's work can be catalogued as a 'crisis bargaining' study. Through an analysis of sixteen historical crises, they conclude that 'deliberateness' is the main characteristic of crisis.<sup>106</sup> There is no crisis until the challenged party responds. Crises are a 'bargaining phenomenon' and can be understood as sequences of interactions, or 'games.' For example, with 'games' as simple as 'two x two' matrices, it is possible to go directly 'at the heart of the crisis...the choice between accommodation and coercion.'<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Paul 't Hart, 'Symbols, Rituals and Power: the lost dimension of crisis management,' *The journal of contingencies and crisis management*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1993), pp. 36-50; and Murray J. Edelman, *Constructing the political spectacle* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988).

<sup>102</sup> Hermann, *International Crises*, p. 10.

<sup>103</sup> Coral Bell, *The Convention of Crisis: a Study in Diplomatic Management* (London: Oxford Paperbacks, 1971), p. 9.

<sup>104</sup> Charles McClelland, 'The Acute International Crisis,' *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (October 1961), p. 191.

<sup>105</sup> Charles McClelland, 'The anticipation of International Crises: Prospects for theory and research,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 1977), pp. 15-38.

<sup>106</sup> Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict*, p. 18.

<sup>107</sup> Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict*, p. 181.

Studies of crisis at the decision-making level can be interpreted as a response to the 'aseptic' character of these games. They can rely on the etymology of the word crisis, literally, 'to decide.' In particular, the term was originally used in medicine as the moment in which the intensification of the illness required a 'decision.'<sup>108</sup> James Robinson accordingly defined crises as 'occasion for decisions' that could be catalogued according to three characteristics: the origin (internal or external), the amount of time available to respond, and the type of values threatened.<sup>109</sup> Largely inspired by Robinson, Hermann developed a 'cube' in which events could be inserted according to: the levels of threat perceived (high-low), the level of awareness by decision-makers (unexpected-anticipated) and the time that decision makers perceive to have to respond (extended-short).<sup>110</sup> From these dimensions, Hermann derived a definition of crisis as 'a situation that 1) threatens high priority goals of the decision-making unit, 2) restricts the amount of time available...3) surprises the members of the decision-making unit.'<sup>111</sup> This definition opened up several areas of disagreement. Many scholars have contested the requirement of surprise, pointing out that the interpretation of the event as a future trend, more than the perception of surprise, defines the outbreak of a crisis.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, other scholars have suggested, that there exist crisis situations that 'do not occasion surprise;'<sup>113</sup> and that the broader contours of a crisis can often be anticipated.<sup>114</sup>

More crucially, the first of Hermann's condition has been the object of a heated debate. Around this dimension, revolve three main issues: the

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<sup>108</sup> Colin Hay, *Re-stating social and political change* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1996), p. 86.

<sup>109</sup> James Robinson, 'Crisis,' in David Sills (Ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 3 (London: MacMillan, 1968), pp. 510-514.

<sup>110</sup> Hermann, *International*, p. 14.

<sup>111</sup> Hermann, *International*, p. 13.

<sup>112</sup> Phil Williams, *Crisis Management* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1976), p. 23.

<sup>113</sup> Michael Brecher, *Crises in World Politics* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), p. 17.

<sup>114</sup> Howard Lentner, 'The Concept of crisis as viewed by the United States Department of State,' in Hermann, *International*.

'depth' of crises, their ontology, and decision-makers' role in them. The different interpretations can be positioned along a continuum: at one pole crises are interpreted as a response to external tension. 'There would be no crisis for the decision-making unit,' Lentner argued, 'if there weren't something out there.'<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Brecher argued that, for a crisis to occur, two types of values needed to be threatened: 'context-specific high-priority values,' representing the ideological and material interests of the decision-making unit, and 'core values,' shared by the decision-making unit and the mass public.<sup>116</sup> At the opposite extreme, crises are largely what decision-makers make of them. Thomas Halper contended that a threat to the decision-makers' image was sufficient to spur a crisis. US Presidents, he contended, define a foreign policy situation as a crisis when it is perceived as 'constituting serious and immediate threats to national or Presidential appearances of strength, competence or resolve, even if these situations do not pose substantial dangers to national security.'<sup>117</sup> Similarly, Jutta Weldes famously argued that in the Cuban Missile Crisis, the missiles were irrelevant; what mattered was US credibility. Appearances made the crisis.<sup>118</sup> Considering this vast disagreement on the definition of crises, it is surprising that two elements within the literature seem to enjoy a certain consensus: the temporal finiteness of crises and their inherent 'manageability.'

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<sup>115</sup> Lentner, 'The Concept,' p. 7.

<sup>116</sup> Brecher, *Crises*, p. 18.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas Halper, *Foreign Policy Crises: appearance and reality in decision-making* (Columbus: Merrill Publishing Company, 1971), p. iii.

<sup>118</sup> Jutta Weldes, *Constructing national interests: the United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 86.

### 3.5.1.2 The 'explosion thesis' and the origins of crisis

In the shadow of Coral Bell's pioneering study, crises are generally considered as finite events. A crisis is a defined, isolable phenomenon.<sup>119</sup> More specifically, in spite of using different names, many scholars agree that a crisis evolves in specific phases. Whether it is divided in 'onset,' 'escalation,' and 'de-escalation,'<sup>120</sup> or 'precipitant,' 'challenge-resistance,' 'confrontation,' and 'resolution,'<sup>121</sup> or again 'pre-crisis,' 'early crisis,' 'acute crisis,' and 'bargaining-resolution,'<sup>122</sup> a crisis is often linked to a pre-crisis period in which it seems to explode. The 'onset', Brecher argued, 'is indicated by the outbreak of a crisis, that is the eruption of higher-than-normal disruptive interaction.'<sup>123</sup> A protracted, underlying conflict, can be distinguished from the explosion of a crisis situation.<sup>124</sup> This 'explosion thesis' has focused the attention of the literature on a specific set of phenomena.

The origins of crises have been explained in terms of limits of decision-making, both internal to the decision-making process, and affecting it from outside. At the individual level, stress,<sup>125</sup> cognitive,<sup>126</sup> and motivational biases<sup>127</sup> have played the part of the usual suspects. Groups and organisations have been equally singled out. If the agreement on groups' responsibility has been feeble, due to the mixed evidence from studies of

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<sup>119</sup> Bell, *The convention*, p. 9.

<sup>120</sup> Brecher, *Crises*.

<sup>121</sup> Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict*.

<sup>122</sup> Halper, *Foreign*.

<sup>123</sup> Brecher, *Crises*, p. 26.

<sup>124</sup> Brecher, *Crises*, p. 58.

<sup>125</sup> Ole R. Holsti, 'Time, Alternatives and Communications: the 1914 and Cuban Missile Crises,' in Hermann *International*; and Ole R. Holsti, 'Crisis Decision-making,' in Philip E. Tetlock, *et al.* (Eds), *Behavior, Society and Nuclear War*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>126</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), and Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: the nature of International crisis* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

<sup>127</sup> Irving L. Janis and Leon Mann, *Decision-making* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

group dynamics,<sup>128</sup> 'organizational responsibilities' have received much attention since Graham Allison's Model II warned against reliance on 'standard operating procedures.'<sup>129</sup> More recent scholarship also suggests that organisations are geared towards the achievement of goals and the collection of 'normal data;' and not towards the prevention of events and the collection of 'aberrant' data. Moreover, both organisations and personnel within them often prefer to use information as a source of power to enhance their status, instead of sharing it.<sup>130</sup> If the focus moves to external factors, electoral pressures and the power of 'domestic audiences' to judge a President's action have played a major part.<sup>131</sup> The presence of domestic political factors has been interpreted as a 'source of misperception,'<sup>132</sup> more than a dimension of its own.

The unfortunate focus on these dimensions has derailed the crisis literature towards an overflow of recommendations, to amend the decision-making process or reform the actors involved in it. These recommendations are based on a general faith in the possibility of managing crises correctly. The hope is that crises, if properly managed, might turn into a 'staged drama' through which states can achieve their aims without fighting.<sup>133</sup> From a cognitive and political psychology perspective, some scholars criticised the excessive reliance on recommendations. Lebow affirmed that reform projects are based on the assumption that 'leaders will be willing to make purposeful efforts to structure an environment that elicits and encourages

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<sup>128</sup> Paul 't Hart, Eric K. Stern and Bengt Sundelius (Eds.), *Beyond Groupthink* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), and Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander (Eds.), *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory* (London: Tavistock, 1968).

<sup>129</sup> Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 1999), p. 174.

<sup>130</sup> Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius, *The Politics of Crisis Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 20-23.

<sup>131</sup> Lebow, *Between*; and James Fearon, 'Domestic Political Audiences and the escalation of international disputes,' *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (September 1994), pp. 577-592.

<sup>132</sup> Lebow, *Between*.

<sup>133</sup> Bell, *The Convention*, p. 116.



critical thinking and dissent.' Such an assumption, generally unrealistic, becomes extremely problematic in a situation as stressful and demanding as a crisis.<sup>134</sup> Ole Holsti added that the first casualties of a stress-inducing crisis situation are those 'very abilities that are most vital for coping effectively with such situations.'<sup>135</sup> Going beyond this type of critique and through a closer look at the 'crisis literature,' however, it is possible to collect a series of hints that seem to weaken both the 'manageability' and the 'finiteness' assumptions.

### **3.5.2 The nature of crisis: enter risk and uncertainty**

In his definition, Brecher recognised the presence of an element of 'probability.' The 'perceived heightened probability of involvement in military hostilities' represented the 'pivotal condition' for crisis.<sup>136</sup> Snyder and Diesing reached the same conclusion. The requirement of a 'high probability of war' was used, in their account, to introduce the presence of an element of uncertainty. Uncertainty derived from both the imperfect nature of information on the others' actions and intentions, and from a lack of total control over events.<sup>137</sup> In making their point, these authors explicitly took inspiration from Schelling's understanding of crises. The 'crisis' that is confidently believed to involve no danger of 'things getting out of hand,' Schelling warned, 'is no crisis no matter how energetic the activity.'<sup>138</sup> Crises take place in a realm of risk and uncertainty. Decision-makers, Schelling warned, are not authors of clear-cut, yes or no decisions. Each decision is rather the result of a 'dynamic process' in which decision-makers 'get more and more deeply involved, more and more expectant, more and more concerned.'<sup>139</sup> This process lies in great part beyond their control and awareness. Crises do not derive from a key accident, from a momentous

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<sup>134</sup> Lebow, *Between*, p. 296.

<sup>135</sup> Holsti, 'Crisis,' p. 36.

<sup>136</sup> Brecher, *Crises*, p. 20.

<sup>137</sup> Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict*, p. 8.

<sup>138</sup> Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (London: Yale University Press, 2008 [1966]), p. 97.

<sup>139</sup> Schelling, *Arms*, p. 98.

decision, or from an organisational flaw; but from a 'process of commitment that is itself unpredictable.'<sup>140</sup> This idea of an unpredictable dynamic process leading to the emergence of crisis stands in contrast with the orthodoxy of the 'crisis literature' in which crises usually 'explode' in a demarcated 'on-set phase.' Schelling's account points to the second series of hints suggesting the need to reinterpret crises.

In spite of their focus on bargaining, Snyder and Diesing admitted that 'the real causes of a crisis are more likely to be found in the general precipitant' at the national level. However, they added, this precipitant should not be interpreted as a single 'cause' but rather as a series of developments that made the conflict boil over into a crisis.<sup>141</sup> Lebow similarly explained crises as the result of a challenge to the other's commitment. Two elements were responsible for this challenge: a 'need,' coming from strategic and domestic requirements, and the perceptions that the challenge would be swallowed by the adversary. Whereas psychological biases were responsible for the perceptions, the 'need' had deeper domestic political roots.<sup>142</sup> Concluding his study, Lebow seemed to go beyond this 'primacy of domestic politics' argument. The emergence of crises, he wrote, depended on the more general 'environment,' both domestic and strategic. Crises evolved through 'amplified feedback networks' in which the effects of previous choices are amplified and reverberated in following stages. The emergence depended on patterns 'established long before the onset of a crisis.'<sup>143</sup> This argument has recently received confirmation.

Crises, Arjen Boin and his colleagues argue, do not 'explode', they evolve slowly. They 'travel the continuum from the 'no problem' pole to the 'deep crisis' end.'<sup>144</sup> This travel occurs, in great part, beyond the control of policymakers. Abandoning the 'crises as events' orthodoxy, this scholarship

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<sup>140</sup> Schelling, *Arms*, p. 93.

<sup>141</sup> Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict*, p. 12.

<sup>142</sup> Lebow, *Between*, p. 60.

<sup>143</sup> Lebow, *Between*, p. 335.

<sup>144</sup> Boin *et al.*, *The politics*, p. 4.

has suggested that crises are more like diseases,<sup>145</sup> in which the causes, or pathogens, live in the system long before the emergence of the first symptoms or the recognition of their presence. This new scholarship has correctly pointed to the need to substitute the traditional linear thinking (big events need to have big causes), with an emphasis on complexity and unintended consequences. 'Multiple causes...interact over time to produce a threat with devastating potential.'<sup>146</sup> Crises do not have a pre-crisis period but develop, through reiterative and self-reinforcing patterns, ultimately leading to a narrowing down of the options available and to the emergence of 'symptoms.'<sup>147</sup>

Such interpretation finds support in the 'disaster literature.' Crises and disasters represent stern 'wake up calls,' reminding decision-makers that the assumptions that had guided their policies were wrong.<sup>148</sup> This process accumulates slowly.<sup>149</sup> Hence, scholars need to focus on the 'normality period' as the stage in which errors and mistakes started to accumulate, going unnoticed.<sup>150</sup> The 'normality period' is the breeding ground of crisis. The study of crisis has started to move in the same direction with the 'crisis as disease' thesis and with the inclusion in the analysis of the 'sense-making period,' the period in which decision-makers start to perceive that something is wrong.<sup>151</sup> However, it should be noted that even these scholars, beyond the significant recognition of the 'different' nature of crises, have fallen back on 'traditional' issues. They have identified organisational and decision-making shortcomings as main culprits, and

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<sup>145</sup> This definition also goes back to the original meaning of the word 'crisis.'

<sup>146</sup> Boin *et al.*, *The politics*, p. 5

<sup>147</sup> Boin *et al.*, *The politics*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>148</sup> Nick Pidgeon, 'The limits of Safety? Culture, Politics, Learning and Man-made disasters,' *Journal of Contingencies and crisis management*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1997), pp. 1-14.

<sup>149</sup> Barry Turner, 'The Organizational and Interorganizational Development of Disaster,' *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (September 1976), p. 380. See also Barry Turner and Nick Pidgeon, *Man-made disasters* (London Butterworth Heinemann, 1997).

<sup>150</sup> Turner, 'The Organizational,' p. 381.

<sup>151</sup> Boin *et al.*, *The Politics*.

have added recommendations to improve the decisional context.<sup>152</sup> The argument made here is different. Crises do not depend on certain types of organisational arrangements, or on certain decision-making practices. They represent instances of decision-makers' loss of control, deriving from the inherent 'limitedness' of foreign policy decision-making. As we have seen, limitedness depends on uncertainty - as lack of information, impossibility of knowing, and lack of control - and on the short-term, minimalist, and constrained nature of risk management. The account will focus on the 'normality' period to see how crises emerge. In particular, it will suggest that crises represent instances of decision-makers' lack of control due to the mis-management of the risks posed by foreign policy issues.

### **3.6 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES ALONG THE COLD WAR/POST-COLD WAR DIVIDE**

As repeatedly stated, this thesis aims critically to assess the claims made in the Beckian and Foucauldian literature about a basic, even fundamental, transformation in the nature and practice of foreign policy making towards a 'risk' approach in the period between the start of the 1990s and the early 2000s. After the analysis of the risk literature, the reconceptualisation of risk, uncertainty and risk management, and the identification of the field in which the thesis will develop, it is, now, time to explicitly spell out the research hypotheses driving the project. **Chapter 2** identified the key propositions of the sociology-inspired IR approaches to risk. These propositions concern three main dimensions. The first dimension deals with the elements of decision-making. Both Foucauldian and Beckian scholars identify risk and uncertainty as brand new elements of the foreign policy decision-making context. The second dimension concerns the practice of foreign policy decision-making. In particular, it is suggested that long-term policies have been abandoned in favour of cyclical, continuous, and short-term practices of risk management. The third dimension concerns the decision-maker and the extent of his/her control over the external

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<sup>152</sup> Boin *et al.*, *The Politics*, pp. 140-150.

environment. In line with the main aim of the thesis, the research hypotheses develop along the same dimensions.

The first research hypothesis assumes the presence and relevance of risk and uncertainty in international contexts along the historical divide. Uncertainty is assumed as natural condition of the foreign policy context. Uncertainty is identified as 'lack of knowledge,' as 'impossibility of knowing,' and as 'impossibility of knowing the consequences of one's own decision'. In the analysis of the decision-making contexts, uncertainty will be operationalised in three main ways. First, in terms of uncertainty as lack of knowledge decision makers will tend to acknowledge difficulties, problems and gaps in their understanding of the situation. Second, it will be suggested that a by-product of uncertainty as impossibility of knowing is the production of several options. The contemporary consideration of several policy choices represents a symptom of insecurity and of the unpredictability of the situation. It permits decision-makers to 'hedge' against uncertainty.<sup>153</sup> Third, in terms of uncertainty as impossibility of control, decision-makers will demonstrate doubts (sometimes fear) as to the consequences of their actions both on the target of the action and on the wider international context.

On risk, the analysis suggests that decision-makers and Presidents treat uncertainty as generative of risk. They reason and take action in terms of explicit or implicit probabilities, and they guard against the probability of something going wrong. Risk can be understood as the unavoidable necessity of making decisions. Risk provides an illusory sense of control, undermined by the prevailing condition of uncertainty.<sup>154</sup> The analysis will identify situations in which decision-makers acted on the basis of explicit or

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<sup>153</sup> See William Kaufman, *The McNamara Strategy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), Chapter 2.

<sup>154</sup> For a similar point see Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, 'Power Politics and the Balance of Risk: hypotheses on great power intervention in the periphery,' *Political Psychology*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 2004), p. 182.

implicit probabilities and in which the decisions were driven by the need to avoid potential negative outcomes either internationally, or domestically.

This element is strongly connected with the second research hypothesis, dealing with the practice of foreign policy decision-making. The second research hypothesis assumes that Presidential foreign policy decision-making can be interpreted as an exercise in risk management and, more specifically, as a series of risk vs. risk trade-offs. The operationalisation of this hypothesis will consist in the identification of key features of risk management in the practice of foreign policy. These features include: minimalism, the acceptance of the containment of risk as a 'victory,' a tendency to go back cyclically to readdress the same problem, and a recognition of the limited possibilities of action both in terms of available resources and in terms of risks inherent in the choice made. The hypothesis also assumes that, when confronted with foreign policy issues, Presidents balance strategic risks at the international level, inherent in the policy chosen, and domestic political risks coming from both the negative political consequences of the policy chosen and the chance that the policy chosen will not be supported. In line with Lamborn, the analysis will suggest that in this balancing act, domestic political short-term risks often take precedence over longer-term ones.

The third hypothesis deals with the outcomes of this balancing act. In particular, it suggests that the minimalism inherent in risk management and the predominance of short-term political risks engender the creation of countervailing risks and, hence, contribute to the emergence of foreign policy crises. Foreign policy crises represent instances of 'lack of control.' US Presidents, in other words, are positioned in a middle area between the Beckian and the Foucauldian account. They lack control but they are not as powerless and guilt-free as the Beckian account would suggest.

Should these hypotheses be verified, the claim to the existence of a 'Great Divide' would be weakened. It would be suggested that post-Cold War

accounts and the conceptualisations of risk and uncertainty on which they are based need a serious reconsideration. What is proposed here, in other words, is a search for continuities where change seems to predominate.

### **3.6.1 Towards the case studies**

In line with the aims of the thesis and with the research hypotheses stipulated at the end of the previous section, the case studies have been selected along the Cold War/Post-Cold War divide. They represent different international contexts and different decision-making environments. The aim is to strongly suggest the existence of continuities and similarities among them. Furthermore, the case studies will focus on US foreign policy and on Presidential management of risks. This choice is, in a sense, inevitable. The sociological literature takes the United States government as its main example of the evolution of the nature and practice of decision-making. The 'decision-theory' literature focuses largely on US Presidents and their approaches to risk. This project must confront these approaches on their own turf.

The analysis will look at the Kennedy Administration and at how it dealt with the question of Cuba, until the emergence of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Carter Administration's management of the Iranian Revolution up to the start of the hostage crisis will represent the second case study. Finally, the Clinton Administration's management of the conflict in Bosnia has been selected for its unequivocally 'post-Cold War' character.<sup>155</sup> Each case study will be preceded by a brief overview of the US foreign policy situation at the time, by a description of the President's predicament, and by an analysis of the uncertainty surrounding the issues at hand. The analysis will continue identifying various 'risk vs. risk' trade-offs, discussing how Presidents managed those risks and how the management contributed to the loss of control and the emergence of crisis. The next chapter will briefly delay the

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<sup>155</sup> A more detailed discussion of these issues and a more thorough justification of the selection process will be provided in Chapter 4.

start of the case studies to consider the methodology and methods that drove the research project.



## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

*Evaluating foreign policy is hard.*<sup>1</sup>  
Stephen Walt.

*God gave physics the easy problems.*<sup>2</sup>  
Steven Bernstein *et al.*

**Chapter 3** ended with a discussion of the research hypotheses and with a description of how the case studies would develop. Before proceeding, however, it seems necessary to explain how those research hypotheses came about, how the project aims to verify them, and why it aims to verify them in the way selected. This chapter can be divided into three main parts. **Part two** will tackle a ‘why’ question, looking at the origins of the project. **Part three** will answer a ‘what’ question, focusing on its methodology. **Part four** looks more specifically at how the research was conducted and at the methods used.

### 4.2 THE ‘WHY’ QUESTION

It is generally suggested that a research project should start from the identification of gaps in the relevant literature. As Barbara Geddes argued, however, a desperate search for gaps in the literature could turn into a search for mythical creatures. The research could as well originate in an ‘intense but unfocused curiosity.’<sup>3</sup> In particular, a sense of ‘annoyance and irritation’ with the available literature can provide the researcher with an

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen M. Walt, ‘Evaluating foreign policy is hard,’ Stephen Walt’s Blog, *A Realist in an Ideological Age*, 21 June 2011, [[http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/20/evaluating\\_foreign\\_policy\\_is\\_hard](http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/20/evaluating_foreign_policy_is_hard)] (accessed 31 July 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Steven Bernstein, *et al.*, ‘God gave physics the easy problems,’ *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2000), pp. 43-76.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory building and research design in comparative politics* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 29.

initial boost.<sup>4</sup> Started as an unfocused interest in the post-9/11 foreign policy literature, this project soon identified risk as dominant theme within this scholarship. The blurred conceptualisation of risk and its alleged role in foreign policy decision-making provided the boost needed.

As we have seen, the recent risk literature in IR reveals two predominant approaches. At a closer look, both understandings start from the same assumption: the recent rise to predominance of risk – coinciding with the end of the Cold War or with 9/11 – and the ensuing uncertainty have radically changed the way in which domestic and foreign policies are conducted. Unsatisfied with this account, and specifically, with the conceptualisations of risk and uncertainty, and with the radical portrayal of decision-makers, the project started a search for better understandings. Failing to find answers in ‘decision theory,’ the project has redefined risk, relying on foreign policy and risk management texts. Going beyond this literature, it has argued that each foreign policy choice implies different risk trade-offs between a strategic and a political dimension. The project identified foreign policy crises as the main testing ground. Building on recent literature, the project substituted an understanding of crises as ‘explosions’ with one of crises as slowly evolving ‘diseases.’ The focus shifted from momentous mistakes, to the slow accumulation of ‘countervailing’ risks. The risks, uncertainty and lack of control inherent in the emergence of crises act as ‘exhibits’ in the case against the Cold War/Post-Cold War divide.

Although starting from ‘annoyance’ and ‘irritation,’ then, the project identified a ‘gap in the literature:’ the lack of a conceptualisation of risk that could be relevant for an analysis of foreign policy decision-making. In an effort to fill this gap, the project also satisfies (with an added twist) two main criteria generally considered necessary for a good research project. First, the object of a research project should be ‘important’ for the real world outside academia. Second, the project should offer a precise

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<sup>4</sup> Geddes, *Paradigms*, p. 29.

contribution to knowledge.<sup>5</sup> The importance is given by the need to moderate the dystopian claims of both Foucauldian and Beckian interpretations. Secondary aims include improving the understanding of risk as a foreign policy variable, contributing to the crisis and decision theory literatures, and strengthening interdisciplinary dialogue. The added twist comes from the nature of the project. The object of research, Richard Lebow argued, should certainly be important; but this should not lead to study everything that is 'hot' in one's own field. It is even better if the spirit and the topic of the project are counter-intuitively 'cold,' that is against the predominant positions.<sup>6</sup> Nothing at this stage, in which the identification of a radical change seems to define much of the current literature, is 'colder' than a project suggesting, at least partial, continuity.

### **4.3 THE 'WHAT' QUESTION**

#### **4.3.1 Interpretation: a game of Scrabble**

The previous section contained terms, such as 'understand,' 'interpretation,' and 'exhibit' that represent more than simple cues as to the nature of the project. At the epistemological level, the primacy of 'understanding' defines both its qualitative and interpretive nature.<sup>7</sup> Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba identified key features of qualitative research: it covers a wide range of approaches, none of which relies on numerical measurement; it focuses on a small number of cases, using intensive interviews or in depth analysis of the historical material; it is discursive and concerned with a

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to methods for students of Political Science* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Enquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Richard N. Lebow, 'Social Science and History: ranchers versus farmers?' in Colin Elman and Miriam F. Elman (Eds.), *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International relations* (London: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 113.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

‘rounded or comprehensive account of some event.’<sup>8</sup> They went on to argue that despite the turf wars between quantitative and qualitative methods, the same underlying logic, the logic of inference, supported both types of method.<sup>9</sup> This project rejects such an assumption and, with it, the ill-concealed suggestion that since the purpose of all research is statistical inference, being qualitative research pre-statistical it is somewhat inferior.<sup>10</sup> More properly:

Even though it is more than possible to describe empirically patterns of social action by using all the elegant correlational apparatus of positivist social science, this would fail to get at the proper subject-matter of social science. It would fail...to give an adequate account or interpretation...in terms faithful to its status as a human product.<sup>11</sup>

The ‘interpretivist’ approach might seem in contrast with claims brought forward in the previous chapter. The chapter suggested the identification of hypotheses and their test through case studies. In this sense, the project seemed to conform to a ‘hypothetic-deductive’ model. This model is generally appropriated by ‘positivist approaches’ and consists of four main steps: the generation of hypotheses, the derivation of predictions, the test of hypotheses, and their confirmation or disconfirmation. These four steps, however, are as central to interpretivist approaches as they are to positivist ones. In both camps scholars will:

Observe and form hunches...They then assess whether the bits of information they have gathered fit the interpretation they have posited, or they consider the fit of competing interpretations with the same basic set of ‘facts’ they have gathered on their subject.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> King *et al.*, *Designing*, p. 3

<sup>9</sup> King *et al.*, *Designing*.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy J. McKeown, ‘Case Studies and the Statistical Worldview,’ *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 161-190.

<sup>11</sup> John A. Hughes, *The Philosophy of Social Research* (London: Longman, 1990), p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Pollins, ‘Beyond Logical Positivism: reframing King, Keohane and Verba,’ in Richard N. Lebow and Mark Lichbach (Eds.), *Theory and Evidence*

The purpose of finding a fit between interpretations and ‘facts,’ in inverted commas, implies scepticism towards any understanding of social sciences as an irresistible march towards the Truth.<sup>13</sup> As in a game of *Scrabble*:

We begin with concepts and rules that make many outcomes possible. We can crisscross or add letters to existing combinations, but all these entries must be supportive and must at least partially build on existing words and the concepts that underlie them.<sup>14</sup>

The *Scrabble* metaphor is not dissimilar from the metaphor of social science as a court in which ‘the issue of the warrants for the assertions made turns on appraisal, that is, on weighing the evidence.’ This image proves especially true since, as in a court, ‘undecidable questions have to be decided, on the basis of offering and rebutting “evidence,” not conclusive proof.’<sup>15</sup> In both a game of *Scrabble* and a court, standards are crucial. Not everything is permitted and standards differentiate between plausible and implausible claims. A qualitative, interpretive account is not a march towards the Truth, but neither is it a totally constructivist narrative. As Ian Lustick suggested, a balance needs to be struck between being “constructivist” enough to recognize the unavoidable intrusion of point of view... but “realist” enough to ascribe actual truth value’, with a small t, to some accounts.<sup>16</sup> The only way to ascribe truth-value is to submit one’s own claim to the scrutiny of others. Social science is communicative. Brian Pollins’ suggestion of a new ‘minimal methodology,’ based on falsifiability and replicability seems more than pertinent. Falsifiability implies that others ‘must have a fair chance to demonstrate that our claim about the world is subject to their opposition.’

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*in Comparative Politics and International Relations* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> Richard N. Lebow, ‘What can we do? How can we know?’ in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence*, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Lebow, ‘What,’ p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Kratochwil, ‘Evidence, Inference and Truth as Problems of Theory Building in the Social Sciences,’ in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence*, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Ian S. Lustick, ‘History, Historiography and Political Science: multiple historical records and the problem of selection bias,’ *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (September 1996), p. 613.

Reproducibility means guaranteeing to other the possibility of retracing the steps made by the researchers.<sup>17</sup>

At the ontological level, the project rejects the radical positivist notion of evidence as 'unproblematic.' The analysis of a social fact is different from the analysis of 'brute' facts such as the presence of a mountain. At least partially, scholars need to 'import' meanings if they want to identify the relevant evidence.<sup>18</sup> These meanings are not imported casually, but the very nature of the research project defines which ones will be imported. Previous thinking, or foreknowledge, informs every research project.<sup>19</sup> 'The "framework" through which evidence is collected is given by the researcher, not by the "facts" themselves.'<sup>20</sup> This does not mean that the researcher can distort the evidence, otherwise it would be considered unacceptable in 'court,' as much as cheating in *Scrabble*. The core of interpretivism is represented by an effort to 'translate' what can be observed, in the language of scholarly research, 'without changing the meaning of what is' or was 'experienced by the subjects themselves.'<sup>21</sup> The main concern is a high-fidelity representation of how the subjects studied understood the situation they were confronting, regardless of how complex this understanding might be. Interpretation rejects positivist faith in the possibility of identifying clearly delimited independent variables. It abandons a premium on parsimony for its own sake; instead it tries to

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<sup>17</sup> Pollins, 'Beyond,' p. 94.

<sup>18</sup> John R. Searle, *The construction of social reality* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> McKeown, 'Case studies,' p. 181.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander L. George and Timothy J. McKeown, 'Case studies and theories of organizational decision making,' in Lee S. Sproull and Patrick D. Larkey (Eds.), *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations*, Vol. 2 (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1985), p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Ted Hopf, 'The limits of interpreting evidence,' in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence*, p. 59.

uncover 'details, complexity and situated meanings' of those who lived the experiences.<sup>22</sup>

#### **4.3.2 From interpretation to foreign policy decision-making**

The same process of 'uncovering' is at the centre of the foreign policy decision-making approach. The approach developed from the behavioural revolution of the 1950s as a critique of the realist study of international politics in terms of states' actions.<sup>23</sup> The establishment of a decision-making approach aimed at the creation of a 'normal science' of foreign policy. Many of the scholars within the 'first generation' adopted 'quantitative, positivist (scientific) models.'<sup>24</sup> This project, epitomised by Comparative Foreign Policy, failed, but a broader approach survived, inspired by the founding text, *Foreign Policy Decision-Making* (itself an effort to achieve a 'positivist' study of foreign policy). Originally published in 1954, the study aimed at positioning the individual at the centre of decision. The approach entailed two methodological choices: a state is its decision-makers, and the study of foreign policy needs to be conducted from a 'decision-maker's point of view.'<sup>25</sup> Since then, this scholarship has evolved, adopting multiple methods and methodologies, but often maintaining key assumptions, such as the primacy of agency over structure.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas A. Schwandt, 'Constructivist, Interpretivist approaches to Human inquiry,' in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Landscapes of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues* (London: SAGE, 1998), p. 222.

<sup>23</sup> Walter Carlsnaes, 'Foreign Policy,' in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons (Eds.), *Handbook of International Relations* (London: SAGE, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Laura Neack, Jeanne A. K. Hey, and Patrick J. Haney, 'Generational Change in Foreign Policy Analysis,' in Laura Neack, Jeanne A. K. Hey, and Patrick J. Haney (Eds.), *Foreign Policy Analysis: continuity and change in its second generation* (Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin / Valerie Hudson, Derek H. Chollet, and James Goldgeiger, *Foreign Policy Decision-making Re-visited* (New York, Palgrave and MacMillan, 2002), p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> David Patrick Houghton, 'Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision-Making: toward a constructivist approach,' *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 3 (2007), pp. 24-45.

In this regard, it should be noted that the approach has been accused of never coming to grips with the 'agency-structure' problem.<sup>27</sup> This is not the place to solve the 'Gordian knot'<sup>28</sup> of the agency-structure debate in either IR, or foreign policy analysis. However, it should be acknowledged that within the foreign policy decision-making literature, the attempt to identify how the two dimensions interact represented a key concern.

Margaret and Harold Sprout famously argued that to explain foreign policy choice one had to look at the 'psycho milieu' of decision-makers' psychology, and cognition and at the 'operational environment'.<sup>29</sup> From a realist perspective, Arnold Wolfers similarly wrote that foreign policy was determined by how an actor's 'prism' filtered the external environment.<sup>30</sup> In similar terms, Michael Brecher suggested that a decision could be explained only through an understanding of how the 'operational environment' is filtered through the 'images' of decision-makers.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, the focus on decision-makers did not exclude a consideration of the 'environment.' The main aim was the simultaneous consideration of the domestic and international environment.<sup>32</sup> Richard Snyder and his co-authors suggested the adoption of an 'action-situational' analysis that made it possible to 'emphasize that state behaviour is determined but to avoid deterministic explanations.'<sup>33</sup> 'The concept of situation,' they wrote, 'requires investigation of how relations among past action, existing rules, strategies of

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Carlsnaes, 'The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (September 1992), pp. 245-270.

<sup>28</sup> Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, 'The Gordian Knot of Agency—Structure in International Relations,' *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 2001), pp. 5-35.

<sup>29</sup> Harold and Margaret Sprout, *The Ecological Perspective on Human relations with Specific reference to International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

<sup>30</sup> Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: An analysis of decision-making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> James Barber and Michael Smith (Eds.), *The Nature of Foreign Policy: a reader* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1974).

<sup>33</sup> Snyder *et al.*, *Foreign Policy*, p. 75.



action, and particular aspects of the setting are established by decision-makers.’<sup>34</sup>

At the subnational level, a foreign policy decision-making approach permits us to include both domestic and international factors in the understanding of decisions. Decision-makers can be viewed as ‘operating in a dual-aspect setting so that apparently unrelated internal and external factors become related in the actions of decision-makers.’<sup>35</sup> The external setting - of conditions beyond national boundaries - and the internal setting - of domestic politics, public opinion and other pressures - met in a decision-maker’s ‘definition of the situation.’<sup>36</sup> The inclusion of both dimensions represents a third way between interpretations based on the ‘primacy of domestic politics,’ and those - adopted by most decision theory literature - excluding domestic politics altogether.<sup>37</sup> As Lawrence Freedman argued the exclusion of politics came from a ‘false dichotomy’ that led scholars to consider logic and politics as ‘alternative and mutually exclusive ways to policy-making.’ Decisions, in his opinion, developed along a continuum between the two poles.<sup>38</sup>

More recently, several scholars have started to reconsider the exclusion of domestic factors. James N. Rosenau argued that foreign policy reflects both an ‘opportunity...elsewhere in the world,’ and domestic factors.<sup>39</sup> Some argued that the relevance of domestic politics in foreign policy increased with the end of the Cold War, that unipolarity made the international system

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<sup>34</sup> Snyder *et al.*, *Foreign Policy*, p. 75.

<sup>35</sup> Snyder *et al.*, *Foreign Policy*, p. 85.

<sup>36</sup> Snyder *et al.*, *Foreign Policy*, p. 60.

<sup>37</sup> See Wolfers’ ‘house on fire metaphor,’ in Wolfers, *Discord*, p. 13, and Helen Milner’s ‘poliarchy theory,’ in Helen Milner, *Interests, institutions and information* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Freedman, ‘Logic, Politics and Foreign Policy Processes: a critique of the Bureaucratic Politics Model,’ *International Affairs*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (June 1976), p. 436.

<sup>39</sup> James Rosenau, ‘Introduction: new directions and recurrent questions in the comparative study of foreign policy,’ in Charles Hermann, Charles Kegley, and James Rosenau (Eds.), *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 2.

closer to the domestic one,<sup>40</sup> or that globalisation made ‘foreign relations less foreign.’<sup>41</sup> This, however, might be another case of an unnecessary historical divide. Foreign policy decision-makers, and especially Presidents, have never been completely isolated from domestic political dynamics.<sup>42</sup> As Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall have recently suggested, the study of American foreign policy should be conducted at the ‘intermestic level,’ that is where the international and the domestic meet.<sup>43</sup> The foreign policy decision-making approach permits not only a focus on the actors making the decisions, going beyond the ‘black box’ of state actors, but it recognises the existence of ‘pink, purple, brown, and blue boxes’ and works towards opening them.<sup>44</sup> As much as ‘interpretivism,’ it values complexity and depth, at the expense of parsimony.<sup>45</sup>

#### **4.3.3 Interpretation, foreign policy decision-making and risk**

From this account, it should be clear how an interpretive methodology and the decision-making approach are strongly interconnected with the aims and the key tenets of the project. The previous chapter positioned risk at the centre of this project. It defined risk as ‘the probability of something going wrong,’ and it made clear that risks depend on decision-makers’ engagement with an issue. In this sense ‘probability’ is not something out there. Probabilities cannot be neutrally assessed. They refer to probabilities for someone, for the decision-makers; specifically for the President. In other words, when the project identifies the risks Presidents managed, it does so interpreting their ‘definition of the situation,’ uncovering the main features

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Jervis, ‘Unipolarity a structural perspective,’ *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2009), pp. 188-213.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas G. Paterson *et al.*, *American Foreign Relations: A History*, Vol. 2, *Since 1895* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2010), p. 469

<sup>42</sup> Campbell Craig and Fredrick Logevall, *America’s Cold War* (London: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Craig and Logevall, *America’s*, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Roger Hilsman, *The Politics of Policymaking in defense and foreign affairs* (Eastbourne: Antony Rowe, 1992), p. 53.

<sup>45</sup> Valerie M. Hudson, ‘Foreign Policy Analysis: actor-specific theory and the Ground of International Relations,’ *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2005), pp. 1-30.

of their predicament. In line with the methodology of the project, the conceptualisation of risk provided in this study, is a 'constructivist light' one. The probability of something going wrong depends on 'something out there,' but also on how that something is perceived, and on how it becomes the object of decision.<sup>46</sup>

The project also interprets Presidents as the ultimate foreign policy decision-makers. The President is not just another politician.<sup>47</sup> Even Morton Halperin, leading figure of the 'bureaucratic politics' scholarship, acknowledged the particular role of the President. He suggested that, whereas the 'actions of the American government related to foreign policy result from the interests and behavior of many different groups and individuals,' the President 'stands at the center of the foreign policy process' and his contribution is 'qualitatively different' from that of other actors.<sup>48</sup> A President's choices, his style, and his management of risks make a difference.<sup>49</sup> The project suggests that a President's task is to balance strategic and political risks in difficult and uncertain trade-offs, but also that the President is neither helpless nor free from responsibilities. The project, to be sure, will discuss other actors and organisations in the decision-making process, but it will acknowledge that the President's choices shape foreign policy. Within the limits of 'bounded' risk management, the President is still 'king,'<sup>50</sup> perhaps not an absolute one.

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<sup>46</sup> See on the same point Michael Power, *Organized Uncertainty Designing a World of Risk Management* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Steve Smith, 'Perspectives on the Foreign Policy System: Bureaucratic Politics Approaches,' in Michael Clarke and Brian White (Eds), *Understanding foreign policy: the foreign policy system approach* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1989).

<sup>48</sup> Morton Halperin (with Priscilla A. Clapp and Arnold Kanter), *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), pp. 4 and 16.

<sup>49</sup> For a recent argument in favour of the relevance of Presidential leadership and choices, see Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Presidential Leadership and the creation of the American Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Krasner, 'Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland),' *Foreign Policy*, No. 7 (Summer 1972), p. 167.

Furthermore, agreeing with Lamborn, the previous chapter has identified 'contingency' as the key concept in any discussion of foreign policy. 'Contingency' means the impossibility of understanding foreign policy decision-making without taking both the domestic and international dimension into account. The project will suggest that, for every decision, Presidents consider both the strategic and political consequences of their actions. To be precise, they do not consider only the immediate, direct and visible consequences, but also potential consequences: potential public reactions, potential Congressional and media criticisms, potential 'punishment' at the ballot box, potential attacks to their domestic political agenda.<sup>51</sup> They consider the possibility of things going wrong, that is, risks. This project focuses precisely on how the needs of the political and strategic settings are balanced, permitting a better understanding of the day-to-day practice of foreign policy.<sup>52</sup> Instead of a set of clear decisions, foreign policy emerges from a 'continuing and confusing flow of action.'<sup>53</sup> More specifically, although the presence of risk and risk management is one of the hypothesis that needs to be verified, it is interesting to note at this stage that Snyder and his co-authors suggested that foreign policy decision-making relied on a continuous circle of implementation, re-appraisal, and adjustments to achieve a desired outcome.<sup>54</sup> In this flow, crises are not the outcome of a clear mistake, but emerge from a slow process of mismanagement of risks.

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Knecht, 'Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: the Stages of Presidential decision making,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (2006), pp. 705-727.

<sup>52</sup> Snyder *et al.*, *Foreign Policy*, p. 78.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Clarke, 'The Foreign Policy System: a framework for analysis,' in Clarke and White (Eds), *Understanding*, p. 27.

<sup>54</sup> Miriam Steiner, 'Review article: The Elusive Essence of Decision,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 1977), p. 393.

#### 4.3.4 Case studies: case studies as cases of something

The premium on complexity and richness couples interpretation and decision-making with a particular method of testing hypotheses: case studies. Case studies have been heavily criticised as unscientific and non-replicable.<sup>55</sup> More problematically, there seems to be little consensus on what the use of case studies entails.<sup>56</sup> Starting from a very basic requirement, a case study has been defined as a 'case of something.'<sup>57</sup> More to the point, a case study can be understood as an 'intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units.'<sup>58</sup> It is an instance of a class of events; not an historical event in itself, but 'a well-defined aspect of a historical episode that the investigator selects for analysis.'<sup>59</sup>

Alexander George and Andrew Bennett discussed strengths and weaknesses of this method. Strengths include: high conceptual validity, that is the possibility of accounting for complexity; the possibility of discovery, through immersion in the case studies; the explanation of more complex causal mechanisms; and the understanding of difficult causal relationships.<sup>60</sup> The weaknesses concern the problem of selection, the excess of explanatory richness, and the problem of replicability. The freedom of selection has been accused of paving the way for 'selection bias.' In qualitative research, selection bias occurs when the researcher selects cases in which 'independent and dependent variables vary as the favoured

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<sup>55</sup> Jack S. Levy, 'Qualitative Methods in International Relations,' in Michael Brecher and Frank P. Harvey (Eds.), *Millennial reflections on International studies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 432.

<sup>56</sup> John Gerring, 'What is a case study and what is it good for?' *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 98, No. 2 (May 2004), pp. 341-354.

<sup>57</sup> Audie Klotz, 'Case Selection,' in Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash (Eds.), *Qualitative Methods in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 43.

<sup>58</sup> Gerring, 'What is,' p. 342

<sup>59</sup> Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Study and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (London: MIT Press, 2005), p. 18.

<sup>60</sup> George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, pp. 19-20.

hypothesis suggests, ignoring cases that appear to contradict the theory and overgeneralizing from these cases to wider populations.’<sup>61</sup> Still, case studies have a tendency not to over-generalise.<sup>62</sup> The specific characteristic and outcome of a case are the main focus, moderating the other weaknesses attributed to case studies project. Case studies lack representativeness, but representativeness is not the main concern. Similarly, case studies explanations are often over-determined, but the premium in this type of research is on complexity and detail, not on parsimony.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, ‘structured focused comparison’ provides a method to improve replicability. The comparison of different cases is focused ‘insofar as the researcher deals selectively with only those aspects of each case that are believed to be relevant to the research objectives.’ In this case, these aspects include: the context of uncertainty, the President’s predicament, and the risk trade-offs. It is structured ‘when the researcher...defines and standardizes the data requirements...by formulating theoretically relevant general questions to guide the examination.’<sup>64</sup> The discussion of the research hypotheses at the end of the previous chapter seems to provide sufficient specificity to permit the adoption of this method. Certainly there is a drawback. ‘Some unique qualities of the explanation inevitably will be lost in the process.’<sup>65</sup> However, a certain amount of simplification and a certain loss of information are inevitable in any scientific endeavour. Each case becomes an ‘interpretive history,’ ‘not intended to cover all aspects...of the events or to analyse all decisions, only those pertaining to the research questions under consideration.’<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, p. 22.

<sup>62</sup> George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, p. 25.

<sup>63</sup> Clive Seale, ‘Validity, Reliability and the quality of social research,’ in Clive Seale (Ed.), *Researching Society and Culture* (London: SAGE, 2004), p. 76.

<sup>64</sup> George and McKeown, ‘Case studies,’ p. 41.

<sup>65</sup> George and McKeown, ‘Case studies,’ p. 49.

<sup>66</sup> Yaakov Vertzberger, *Risk-taking and decisionmaking: foreign military intervention decisions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 10.

#### 4.3.5 Which case studies? And why?

The previous chapter has already anticipated which case studies have been selected. Research needs are the main reason for the selection.<sup>67</sup> The research project is interested in assessing the extent of the Cold War/Post-Cold War divide in the practice of US foreign policy decision-making. For this reason, the cases studies need to lie across this historical divide. Furthermore, the case studies need to discuss relevant foreign policy issues with high Presidential involvement. The Cuban Missile crisis is generally considered the most dangerous Cold War crisis. The Iran-hostage crisis was arguably one of the deepest crises of the Cold War, and defined the Carter presidency. The crisis in Bosnia and the massacre at Srebrenica, clearly a post-Cold War crisis, included some of the most brutal events of the post-World War Two era. As repeatedly stated, the analysis will not discuss the crisis management phase, but the slow emergence of crisis, and how Presidential risk management contributed to escalation. Beyond the research needs, the selection also seems to conform to more general strategies devised to reduce the drawbacks of the case study method.

The cases selected can be understood as a light version of John Stuart Mill's method of agreement, and a light version of Jack Levy's least-likely case studies. The method of agreement is used to demonstrate continuities in foreign policy in spite of different decision-making and international contexts. It is, however, a light version since, contrary to Mill's model, the project does not verify the presence of a single variable, but of several variables, such as risk, uncertainty, risk management, and lack of control as determinants of similar foreign policy outcomes.<sup>68</sup> The purpose is to stress similarities in the 'independent variables', leading to similar outcomes: crises. Moreover, the cases selected are 'least-likely' cases, that is 'hard cases.' They build on the assumptions that, if the predictions of a theory are satisfied there, 'the theory will hold in other situations that are even more

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<sup>67</sup> George and Bennett, *Case Studies*.

<sup>68</sup> George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, p. 153.

favourable to the theory.’<sup>69</sup> The recent literature on risk and foreign policy, has positioned risk, uncertainty and lack of control as new elements. If the project manages to verify their presence before and after the end of the Cold War, the confidence in the validity of the hypotheses will be strengthened. The cases selected are certainly obvious cases of crises, but they have been selected exactly for their archetypal nature. In this sense, to paraphrase Levy, showing continuities among these case studies is a ‘Sinatra project:’ if I can make it here, I can make it anywhere.

#### **4.4 THE HOW QUESTION: INTERROGATING THE HISTORICAL RECORD.**

Due to the ‘typical nature’ of the crises considered, the project could rely on a wide (and always increasing) range of secondary sources, including: historical accounts, political science and international relations studies, and memoirs. Scholars have warned against the danger of considering secondary sources as a neutral data set. The work of historians is not ‘an unproblematic background narrative.’<sup>70</sup> Even worse, using the work of political scientists as source of data has been compared to ‘brewing tea from already used tea bags.’<sup>71</sup> Memoirs are equally fraught with problems, due to their generally self-serving nature<sup>72</sup> and to hindsight bias.<sup>73</sup> ‘Triangulation’ provides a strategy to overcome the drawbacks of secondary sources. Generally understood as the use of multiple methods (qualitative and quantitative), triangulation has started to be promoted also as an ‘intra-method’ technique, as ‘data triangulation.’<sup>74</sup> Using multiple sources helps in

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<sup>69</sup> Levy, ‘Qualitative’, p. 442.

<sup>70</sup> Lustick, ‘History,’ p. 605.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Schroeder, ‘History and International Relations Theory: Not Use or Abuse, but Fit or Misfit,’ *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), p. 71.

<sup>72</sup> George Orwell, ‘The benefit of Clergy: some note on Salvador Dali,’ 1944 [[http://orwell.ru/library/reviews/dali/english/e\\_dali](http://orwell.ru/library/reviews/dali/english/e_dali)] (accessed 30 July 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Deborah Larson, ‘Sources and Methods in Cold War History: the need for a new theory-based archival approach,’ in Elman and Elman (Eds.), *Bridges*.

<sup>74</sup> Seale, ‘Validity,’ p. 77.



securing an 'in-depth understanding' and provides 'rigor, breadth and depth to any investigation.'<sup>75</sup>

In terms of documents and primary sources, three key problems can be identified. First, a researcher can be submerged by the amount of documents and resources available. The structured nature of the case studies helps in moderating this problem, permitting an approach to the document through an 'interrogation technique.'<sup>76</sup> A second problem is the need to limit the account to what decision-makers knew when the decisions were made. At the cost of appearing one-sided, the study relies largely on American sources. A wider range of sources or an 'international history approach' could provide the researcher with more information and detail on the situation than the decision-makers possessed at the time.<sup>77</sup> A third problem, particularly relevant for this type of project, depends on US Presidents and decision-makers' reticence in discussing domestic politics when dealing with foreign policy.<sup>78</sup> As Anthony Lake brilliantly put it:

Like sex in Victorian times, the political implications of our national security decisions are seldom discussed in the polite company of the President's foreign policy advisors. (Also, like sex in Victorian times, that doesn't mean it isn't on their minds).<sup>79</sup>

The evidence, in other words, can be found. In this interrogation process, archives offer the most consistent source of data. Archives provide a database that is 'comprehensive, coherent, accessible, reflective of what goes behind the scenes as well as what happens in public.'<sup>80</sup> The project relies on documents from three Presidential Libraries. The documents from

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<sup>75</sup> Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, 'Introduction: entering the field of qualitative research,' in Denzin and Lincoln, *The Landscapes*, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Larson, 'Sources,' p. 343.

<sup>77</sup> Craig and Logevall, *America's*, p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> Craig and Logevall, *America's*, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Anthony Lake, *6 Nightmares* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2000), p. 260.

<sup>80</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, 'Expanding the Data Base: historians, political scientists, and the enrichment of security studies,' *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), p. 12.

the Kennedy Library where accessed through the Kennedy Library website. Research trips to Atlanta and Little Rock permitted access to the Carter and Clinton Libraries respectively. The National Security Archives and the Library of Congress were included in a second research trip. At the Library of Congress, the author was able to gain access to the largely neglected personal papers of former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake. Several on-line collections were consulted in the research. These include: the *Documents from the US espionage Den* collection, with documents seized by the Iranian hostage takers in the US Embassy in Tehran;<sup>81</sup> and the personal papers of Lord David Owen, available through the University of Liverpool website. Foreign Relations of the United States collections have proved extremely useful in the Cuban case study. The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, available on-line, have been a useful source for the whole project. Furthermore, other sources from government and international organisations are included in the study. The project also relies on press and media material. Coupled with archival material, these sources help in establishing a reliable chronology and represent a 'code book by which to decipher the meaning of a document.' They help the researcher reconstruct 'the environment in which a document was written', and, through that, the actor's goals.<sup>82</sup> The project relies on the *LexisNexis* UK database, available through the Durham University Library website, and on articles from key American newspapers and periodicals.

The written record is not the only evidence available. Interviews and oral history records form a key part of the project. Several Oral History Collections are available both at the Carter Library, and through the Kennedy Library website. The Foundation for Iranian Studies also provided a rich pool of interviews from both American and Iranian perspectives. Beyond oral history collections, the author conducted several elite semi-structured interviews. This type of interviews represents a 'third way' between the structured interview based on surveys and questionnaires, and

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<sup>81</sup> The volumes are available in PDF on the website archive.org.

<sup>82</sup> Larson, "Sources," pp. 346-347.

the completely unstructured interview in which the interviewee is simply invited to talk.<sup>83</sup> The type of interviews selected seems to benefit the research project in three main ways. First, qualitative interviews aim at accessing an individual's attitudes, values and priorities.<sup>84</sup> Second, qualitative interviews value the power of discovery.<sup>85</sup> Third, they put the archival record in context. They can help in explaining the origins of a certain documents or in identifying unknown ones<sup>86</sup>. With interviews, a trivial, but unavoidable issue is the 'age' of the events under study, and the ensuing problem of finding interviewees. A second, more practical problem is the problem of access. This project, however, has accumulated a high number of interviews in person, through telephone or Skype conversations, and by email. The project used a 'snowballing technique,' with one interview often leading to another one, and with others rapidly following.<sup>87</sup> The project has also identified 'gatekeepers,'<sup>88</sup> that is people or institutions (such as the Wilson Center and the Council of Foreign Relations) with several contacts, and has often relied on 'strong sources:' those 'who left governmental service...for academia' and are 'comfortable with the practice of scholarly research.'<sup>89</sup> Interviewees have been found for the three case studies among both former policy-makers and academics.<sup>90</sup> The highlight has certainly been the interview with former President Jimmy Carter in Plains, Georgia.

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<sup>83</sup> Seale (Ed.), *Researching*.

<sup>84</sup> Bridget Byrne, 'Qualitative Interviewing,' in Seale (Ed.), *Researching*, p. 181.

<sup>85</sup> Robert L. Peabody, *et al.* 'Interviewing Political Elites,' *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Sep. 1990), p. 453.

<sup>86</sup> Lebow, 'Social Science,' p. 131.

<sup>87</sup> Peabody *et al.*, 'Interviewing.'

<sup>88</sup> Byrne, 'Qualitative.'

<sup>89</sup> Peabody *et al.*, 'Interviewing,' p. 453.

<sup>90</sup> A complete list is included in the bibliography.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

‘International Relations experts,’ Joseph Nye recently wrote, ‘all too rarely look seriously at the role of individuals.’<sup>91</sup> The point might be overstated and some IR scholars, including Hans Morgenthau, would beg to differ. Still, the tendency to look at overarching developments with little attention to detail is quite strong. This project looks at the US President and his inner circle in their effort to confront risk and uncertainty. The project started simply as a critique of the available literature on risk and of the sweeping claims it made. Throughout the research, however, it became clear that risk represented both a relevant and a misrepresented concept in IR, and that an effort should have been made to provide clarity. Keeping as the main target a critique of the sociological claims to the novelty of risk, the project has reconceptualised risk, uncertainty, and risk management. It has provided operational definitions, and it has elaborated research hypotheses that, if verified, would help in questioning the existence of a stark Cold War/Post-Cold War divide in the nature and practice of US foreign policy. To conduct this assessment, and in line with the main theoretical claims, the project adopts an interpretive methodology, a ‘constructivist light’ interpretation of risk, and a foreign policy decision-making approach.

The analysis will develop through three case studies with in-depth analysis of the Presidents’ predicament, of the international context, and with a division of the main decisions into ‘risk vs. risk trade-offs.’ The first case study, in **Chapter 5** will look at the Kennedy Administration’s approach to Cuba. After a description of the tense international context of the late 1950s, the chapter will develop through a series of trade-offs. It will portray how the island and its leader, Fidel Castro, moved from an electoral card, to a disturbance in the early days of Camelot, to a dangerous obsession, and finally to the site of the most dangerous crisis the world has ever faced. In a pattern that will be repeated in **Chapter 6** and **7**, the focus will be on the ‘normality’ period, on the calm before the storm of the Missile Crisis.

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<sup>91</sup> Nye, *Presidential Leadership*, p. xi.

## **CHAPTER 5: 'I SHOULD HAVE SAID THAT WE DON'T CARE:' THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION AND CUBA, 1961-1962**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In March 1987, former members of the Kennedy Administration gathered at Hawks Cay, Florida for a conference to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cuban Missiles crisis. Among those invited was former Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara. In the first session, he set the tone for what would prove a path-breaking event:

We should recognize that we didn't then...give much thought to how Moscow will read what we are doing. We'd carried out the Bay of Pigs operation never intending to use American military force – but the Kremlin didn't know that. We were running covert operations against Castro. We'd convinced them we were actively trying to overthrow the Cuban regime. We never had put adequate emphasis on how the Soviets were interpreting our actions and how they might respond.<sup>1</sup>

In line with key claims made by this research project, McNamara's remark seems to point towards a long-term understanding of the origins of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Bay of Pigs invasion, the covert operations, the strong posture against the Soviet Union on Cuba, and on other key decisions such as stepping up the Berlin crisis and deploying the Jupiter missiles in Turkey were made with little regard for both Soviet perceptions, and longer-term risks.

In this context, McGeorge Bundy famously wrote that 'forests have been felled to print the reflections and conclusions of participants, observers, and scholars,' and at least four waves of scholarship can be identified.<sup>2</sup> A closer

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<sup>1</sup> James Blight and David Welch, *On the Brink* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1989), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> The first wave, or 'orthodox scholarship' includes the early accounts of the crisis, and the memoirs of Kennedy aides. Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (New York: Lippincott, 1966), Ted Sorensen, *Kennedy* (Pan Books, London, 1965) and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *One Thousand Days* (London: Andre Deutsch,

look at the literature, however, unveils two main problems. First, preponderant attention goes to the fateful 'thirteen days.' It could be argued that Graham Allison's magisterial account of the crisis is, at least, partially responsible for this problem. Although mainly concerned with decision-making models, Allison's book was crucial in establishing which events should have been taken into account and which should have been discounted.<sup>3</sup> This project agrees with David Barrett and Max Holland that whereas the scholarship on those thirteen days is perhaps saturated, the months that preceded October 1962 remain 'relatively understudied and insufficiently chronicled.'<sup>4</sup> Recent studies either treat issues in isolation,<sup>5</sup> or discuss the intervening months only marginally as the tense origins of the Missile Crisis, or the bitter aftermath of the Bay of Pigs. The second problem is a certain inability of the literature to move beyond the 'orthodox/revisionist' debate. Again, recent works suffer from this problem, trying to establish once and for all if President Kennedy launched a personal

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1965). A second, revisionist wave includes J. F. Stone, 'The brink,' *New York Review of Books*, 14 April 1966, Ronald Steel, 'End Game: Review of Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*,' *New York Review of Books*, 13 March 1969, and James Nathan, 'The Missile Crisis: his finest hour,' *World Politics*, 27 (January 1975), pp. 256-281. A third wave was prompted by a series of conferences in the late 1980s and early 1990s and took advantage of the initial opening of Soviet archives and of the participation of American and Soviet Officials in critical oral history conferences. See James Blight and David Welch, *On the Brink* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1989). A fourth, more recent wave relies on documents from several countries, bringing together their perspective on the crisis. James G. Hershberg and Christian Ostermann, 'The Global Missile crisis at 50,' *Cold War International History Project (CWHIP) Bulletin*, Issue 17/18, Fall 2012, Wilson Center.

[<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/bulletin-no-17-18>] (accessed 24 September 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Graham Allison, *The Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> David M. Barrett and Max Holland, *Blind over Cuba*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), p. x.

<sup>5</sup> James G. Hershberg, 'Before "the missiles of October:" did Kennedy plan a military strike on Cuba?' in James A. Nathan, *The Cuban Missile Crisis revisited* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

vengeance against Cuba and was obsessed with Castro, or if Kennedy was the one trying to restrain 'evil' actors such as the CIA and the military.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, the chapter will represent the 'hardest' case of the thesis. In spite of claims as to the clarity and certainty of the Cold War world, the chapter will repeatedly stress the uncertainty and the dangers inherent in the superpower confrontation. Uncertainty will be discussed both as a predominant condition of the Cold War confrontation, and as a variable affecting every choice. In line with the risk management framework set out in the previous chapters, the account will also identify the short-termism, and minimalism inherent in the Kennedy Administration's approach to Cuba. The decisions taken by the Administration will be interpreted as a series of risk vs. risk trade-offs in which the management of (often self-inflicted) political risks led to the dismissal of longer-term countervailing risks.

The chapter can be divided into two main parts. **Part two** will deal with the uncertainty of the late 1950s, and with the Eisenhower Administration's encounter with Castro's Cuba. **Part three** will look more specifically at the trade-offs faced by Kennedy and will often point out the uncertainty surrounding the President's choices. The analysis will consider Kennedy's Presidential campaign, the Bay of Pigs disaster, the rising tension with the Soviet Union, the stepping up of the harassment campaign against Cuba, and the American reply to the Soviet military build-up in the Caribbean island. What the chapter will suggest is that from the Bay of Pigs to the Missile Crisis, the Kennedy Administration proved unable to reconcile and manage different political and strategic risks. The consistent answer to this conundrum was the selection of 'short-term' policies that were risk-free only in the minds of the Kennedy Administration's members. The reality was starkly different: while doing little to solve the problem of Cuba, these

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<sup>6</sup> Jim Rasenber, *The Brilliant Disaster* (New York: Scribner, 2011), Don Bohning, *The Castro Obsession* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2006) and David Talbot, *Brothers* (New York: Pocket Books, 2007).

measures generally embarrassed the Administration, and did a lot to convince the Soviets that they risked losing their precious Cuban ally. In providing this account, the chapter will also achieve a secondary goal: it will rebalance (even if minimally) the literature on the Missile Crisis, shifting the attention from the thirteen days of the crisis to the eighteen months that preceded it.

## **5.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION, AMERICAN DECLINE, AND ‘THEIR MAN’ IN HAVANA**

### **5.2.1 Sputnik and sausages: Soviet victories and American uncertainty**

*Oh little Sputnik flying high  
with made in Moscow beep.  
You tell the world it's a Commie sky,  
and Uncle Sam's asleep.<sup>7</sup>*  
Mennen Williams, Gov. of Michigan.

‘What’s your hometown Senator?’ quipped the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev during his 1958 talks with Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-Min) in Moscow. ‘It’s Minneapolis, Minnesota,’ the Senator answered. Khrushchev then drew a red mark around the city on a map of the United States and added: ‘I must not forget that we shouldn’t hit that town.’ The exchange was a typical expression of Khrushchev’s confidence at the end of the 1950s. He made similar remarks such as the famous statement that the USSR was producing ‘missiles like sausages,’ and that Soviet missiles could hit any spot in the world.<sup>8</sup> In hindsight, this was a massive - and counterproductive - bluff. To the American public and to American policymakers, however, these statements seemed to confirm dangerous historical trends. The Soviets had maintained their tight grip on Eastern

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes only* (London: Harper and Collins, 1996), p. 240.

<sup>8</sup> Oleg Troyanovski, Interview, *Cold War Project*, George Washington University [<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-8/troyanovski2.html>] (accessed 8 August 2013).



Europe, smashing on the streets of Budapest in 1956 dreams of 'roll-back' that had characterised the start of the decade. They seemed to have infiltrated the most secret corners of American espionage.<sup>9</sup> They postured as being ready to 'bury' the West with Soviet advances in science and arms races. In October 1957, the launch of the first Soviet satellite *Sputnik* had appeared as a terrifying tipping point. The Eisenhower Administration (and particularly the President) never understood the shock that *Sputnik* represented for the American people. It was not so much the satellite in itself, but the fact that the satellite 'showed the existence of a powerful ballistic missile because nothing else could have placed in orbit so large an object.'<sup>10</sup> *Sputnik* came to identify Russian cutting-edge technological advances and American insecurity. The feat was repeated with the Soviet's 1959 launch of *Lunik 1*, the first man-made object to orbit the sun.<sup>11</sup>

In turn, the US seemed paralysed. The series of communist victories (real or imagined) had turned Eisenhower's calm into aloofness, and his detachment into a liability.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, since the early years of the Eisenhower Administration, the US government had achieved several successes. In terms of knowledge of the Soviet Union, the initially bleak outlook of the early 1950s had substantially improved through advances in signal intelligence (SIGINT), infiltrations of Soviet embassies, and defections of Soviet officials. The picture, however, was far from being one of certainty and tranquillity. US intelligence on the Soviet Union remained unreliable.<sup>13</sup> As we have argued in the previous chapters, the problem was both one of lack of knowledge, and one of impossibility of knowing. In terms of Soviet capabilities and intentions, as James Killian, Chair of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, put it, the possibility of a surprise attack

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<sup>9</sup> Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: choices about the bomb in the first fifty years* (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 334.

<sup>11</sup> Fred Kaplan, *1959* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Beschloss, *Kennedy vs. Khrushchev* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991) and David Rothkopf, *Running the World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> Andrews, *For the President's*.

'haunted Eisenhower throughout his Presidency.'<sup>14</sup> Khrushchev's 'atomic bragging' convinced the US that the Soviet Union enjoyed military and scientific superiority, ending the assumption of American primacy that had characterised the post-World War II world.

Similarly, the US seemed unable to stop Soviet advances in the Third World. The Soviets seemed to be winning the battles for 'hearts and minds' in various countries emerging from the yoke of either colonisation or authoritarianism. In spite of US 'successes' in Guatemala and Iran, in fact, other countries seemed ready to jump on the Soviet bandwagon. In retrospect Soviet challenges in these countries appear either overstated or inconsequential. At the time, they appeared as part of a dangerous world trend. The Soviet Union seemed ready to 'shift the balance of power' by winning newly independent countries over to its side.<sup>15</sup> Khrushchev thought that 'under the cloak of nuclear fears,' the Soviet Union could take a leading role in promoting the causes of decolonisation and anti-imperialism.<sup>16</sup> Secretary of State John Foster Dulles explained the US predicament in a speech on the future of US foreign policy, in which he suggested that the enemy was free to choose the time, place and method of warfare. The US needed to adapt.<sup>17</sup> A report commissioned by President Eisenhower reached a similar conclusion. The US had to answer in kind aggressive Soviet plots. If the US was to survive, it had to abandon 'acceptable norms of human conduct,' develop espionage services, and learn to 'subvert, sabotage and destroy' its enemies. It was a 'repugnant

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<sup>14</sup> Andrews, *For the President's*, p. 199.

<sup>15</sup> Herbert S. Dinerstein, *The making of a Missile Crisis: October 1962* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: the Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> John Foster Dulles, 'The Evolution of US foreign policy,' *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. XXX, No. 761, 25 January 1954 [<https://archive.org/stream/departmentofstat301954unit#page/105/module/1up>] (accessed 25 October 2013).

philosophy' but the nature of the enemy made it necessary.<sup>18</sup> In this worldwide confrontation without rules, Laos, Cuba, Congo, and Vietnam represented only some examples. In the 1950s no place was more important than Cuba.

### **5.2.2 Eisenhower and the Cuban revolution: from 'wait and see' to a nasty 'tit for tat'**

In a 1955 state visit to Cuba, Vice President Richard Nixon praised the local dictator Fulgencio Batista as the Cuban Abraham Lincoln.<sup>19</sup> The Eisenhower Administration supported Batista's dictatorship, as it did many other similar regimes in Latin and Central America, as long as they professed anti-communist credentials.<sup>20</sup> In Cuba, the situation started to unravel in the years between 1953 and 1957. The guerrilla forces led by Fidel Castro started their campaign in 1956. When Castro's victory seemed inevitable, the Eisenhower Administration and the CIA scrambled to prevent his triumph. In mid-1958, US Ambassador Earl Smith had urged Cuban Prime Minister Gonzalo Guell to bribe the 'mentally unbalanced' Castro brothers.<sup>21</sup> The US also tried to back an almost non-existent 'third force' between Batista and Castro. In the last months of the regime, with Castro established as the key leader of the opposition, the US changed strategy trying to plot at least three different coups to impede his victory.<sup>22</sup> Castro triumphantly entered Havana on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1959.

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<sup>18</sup> CIA, Report of the Special Study Group on the Covert Activities of the Central Intelligence Agency, 30 September, 1954, [[http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/45/dolittle\\_report.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/45/dolittle_report.pdf)] (accessed 8 August 2013), pp. 2-3.

<sup>19</sup> Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal little Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 2009), p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988)

<sup>21</sup> Schoultz. *That Infernal*, p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> Jesus Arboleya, *The Cuban Counterrevolution* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), pp. 35-38.

Initially, the Eisenhower Administration adopted a 'wait and see' approach towards the new Cuban leader. The Administration confronted a situation of 'high-level uncertainty.'<sup>23</sup> The US was completely unaware of earlier contacts between the Soviet Union and Castro. These included the travel of few former veterans of the Spanish Civil War to Cuba following a request from Raul Castro for help in creating a Marxist-Leninist cadre in the Cuban army, and a purchase of weapons from the Czechs in 1960.<sup>24</sup> Although these factors largely represented 'unknown unknowns' for the Administration, and in spite of later denials,<sup>25</sup> the US quickly moved towards a policy of confrontation.<sup>26</sup>

As early as April 1959, Director of the CIA Allen Dulles wrote to Vice-President Nixon (ready to meet Castro in the US on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April) that Castro was a paranoiac and that his criticism of the US, coupled with the lack of statements on the Soviet Union, created concerns.<sup>27</sup> In a Deputies meeting CIA Deputy Director, General Charles Cabell stated that 'the time was coming when this agency would be called upon to undertake paramilitary operations in Cuba.'<sup>28</sup> After his meeting with Castro, Nixon was somewhat baffled by the Cuban leader. He recognised his qualities as a 'leader of men' and admitted to be unsure about Castro's communist tendencies.<sup>29</sup> By December 1959, however, J. C. King, Chief of the CIA's

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<sup>23</sup> Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War* (New York: Norton and Company, 2006), p. 300.

<sup>24</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's*, p. 296.

<sup>25</sup> Philip Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro, and the United States* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), pp. 145-153, and Schlesinger, *One Thousand*, p. 198.

<sup>26</sup> See Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Allen Dulles, Memorandum for the Vice President, 'Cuba,' 13 April 1959, CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), [[http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP80B01676R002700060019-9.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP80B01676R002700060019-9.pdf)] (accessed 8 August 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Deputies Meeting, 20 April 1959, CIA CREST, [[http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP80B01676R002400060129-0.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP80B01676R002400060129-0.pdf)] (accessed 8 August 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Memorandum, 'Nixon meeting with Castro,' 25 April 1959, Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), *Cuban Missile Crisis Collection* (CMCC).

Western hemisphere division wrote Dulles that Cuba was ruled by a 'dictatorship of the far left.' Accordingly, the US objective should have been 'the overthrow of Castro...and his replacement with a junta.' King also identified four key steps to achieve this aim: a clandestine radio, intrusion and sabotage operations, the establishment of opposition groups backed by the US, and the 'elimination of Fidel Castro.'<sup>30</sup> In January 1960, the President made clear the need to quarantine Cuba. This was agreed, in spite of acknowledging the limited communist influence on the island.<sup>31</sup>

The Soviet Union, in fact, still suffered from a 'post-Guatemala' shock. Operation PBSUCCESS to overthrow Jacobo Arbenz's government had made the Soviet Union continue Stalin's policy of largely ignoring developments in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>32</sup> As even the CIA acknowledged, in early 1960, Castro seemed 'not disposed to accept actual direction from any foreign source.'<sup>33</sup> Gary Powers' U-2 incident, Eisenhower's unwillingness to apologise, and the abortion of the Paris summit led to a change in Soviet policy. Soviet vice-Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyan, visited Havana in February and reached largely economic agreements with Castro. Still, even at the time of the visit, according to Mikoyan's son Sergo, the Soviet Union did not have high expectations for the relations with Cuba.<sup>34</sup> Official diplomatic relations were re-established. Castro, on his part had taken several measures that had antagonised US interests including land reform and expropriations. These measures led to an unprecedented pressure by private groups on the President to do something about Castro.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> J. C. King, Memorandum for the DCI, via DD Plans, 'Cuban problems,' 11 December 1959, CIA CREST, [[http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP80R01731R000300250001-5.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP80R01731R000300250001-5.pdf)] (accessed 8 August 2013).

<sup>31</sup> A. J. Goodpaster, 'Memorandum of conference with the President,' 25 January 1960, CMCC, DNSA.

<sup>32</sup> Dinerstein, *The making*.

<sup>33</sup> CIA, National intelligence Estimate, 'Communist influence in Cuba,' 22 March 1960, CMCC, DNSA.

<sup>34</sup> Sergo Mikoyan (Edited by Svetlana Savranskaya), *The Soviet-Cuban Missile Crisis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> Schoultz, *That infernal*, p. 98.

In January, even before Mikoyan's visit, CIA's Task Force Branch 4 had been established with Jacob Esterline, former Guatemala station chief, as its head.<sup>36</sup> In March, Eisenhower had formally approved a plan based on King's four points. By August, the operation was already in full swing. An anti-Castro group within the United States was being created; Radio Swan had started to air anti-Castro broadcasts from the Swan Islands; and paramilitary groups were training in the US; they would move to Guatemala in July. Assassination attempts (some involving the Mafia) and operations to discredit the Castro regime were under way. Eisenhower had remarked that costs were not a problem, but caution should have been exercised.<sup>37</sup> Soon, however, telegrams from the Brazilian Embassy warned Castro of these developments,<sup>38</sup> and, through media investigations, US training facilities became public knowledge. The tit for tat continued. American companies in Cuba refused to refine Soviet oil. Castro reacted by taking over the companies. The US counter-replied with the 'most unwise' move: cutting the Cuban sugar quota.<sup>39</sup> These two moves finally weakened Soviet scepticism. Khrushchev went out of his way to profess Soviet support, even mentioning the possibility of using Soviet missiles to defend Cuba.<sup>40</sup> Although Castro gave a cold reception to this statement, it provided the US with an opportunity to denounce Soviet intrusion in the hemisphere. In October, the Eisenhower Administration imposed an economic embargo on Cuba, and later broke diplomatic relations.<sup>41</sup> By this time, Cuba had become a key foreign policy issue, and one actor had helped in dramatically raising the profile of Castro and of the fight between Cuba and the United States: Democratic Presidential candidate John Kennedy.

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<sup>36</sup> James Blight and Peter Kornbluh, *Politics of Illusion: The Bay of Pigs invasion re-examined* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998), p. 160.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon Gray, 'Memorandum of meeting with the President,' 22 August 1960, *CMCC*, DNSA.

<sup>38</sup> Telegram, Brazilian Embassy Havana to Secretary of State of Foreign relations, 11 August 1960, *Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited Collection (CMCRC)*, DNSA.

<sup>39</sup> Bonsal, *Cuba*, p. 151.

<sup>40</sup> Dinerstein, *The making*, p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> Bonsal, *Cuba*.

### 5.3 THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION AND CUBA: FROM THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL TO THE MISSILE CRISIS

#### 5.3.1 Risk vs. risk trade-off 1: campaigning tough vs. open choice

At the start of the Presidential bid, John Kennedy had identified being outflanked from the right as his main political risk. The Democratic Party had accumulated a reputation for Cold War weakness.<sup>42</sup> Kennedy had also to guard against his father's reputation as an appeaser<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, the Republican Presidential candidate, Vice-President Richard Nixon, seemed to have sent a clear message on the campaign. Selecting as running mate Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., former US Ambassador to the UN, had meant that foreign policy and in particular experience in confronting the Soviets would play a leading role in the campaign.<sup>44</sup> In spite of a cordial relationship that dated back to the late 1940s,<sup>45</sup> in the campaign Kennedy unleashed strong attacks on Nixon. The Democratic candidate plugged into the sense of uncertainty that pervaded the American people at the end of the 1950s, playing on three key themes: frustration, strategic inferiority and communist expansion.

First, he repeated how a future Nixon Administration would have meant more of the same: more inaction and aloofness. This was even more worrisome, Kennedy argued, since Nixon would have added a dose of policy-making inexperience to the already dreadful Republican record. In a press conference President Eisenhower famously confirmed the point, immediately damaging Nixon in the polls. Asked to name a 'major idea' from Nixon that he had adopted, the reply of the President was: 'If you give me a week, I might think of one, I don't remember'. The exchange soon

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<sup>42</sup> See I. M. Destler, Leslie Gelb, and Anthony Lake, *Our own worst enemy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), and Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), p. 66.

<sup>43</sup> George W. Ball, *The Past has another pattern* (New York: Norton and Company, 1982), p. 166.

<sup>44</sup> Chris Matthews, *Kennedy & Nixon* (New York: Free Press, 2011), p. 136.

<sup>45</sup> Matthews, *Kennedy & Nixon*.

became a Kennedy campaign advert,<sup>46</sup> and represented an 'emotional concussion' for Nixon.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, Kennedy had made Soviet strategic superiority and the so-called 'missile gap' the centrepiece of his political career. The 'gap myth' had emerged in the mid-1950s when a National Intelligence Estimate and a report commissioned by the President from Rowan Gaither, President of the Ford Foundation, concluded that the Soviet Union was ahead, in terms of both number of missiles and technology. The conclusions of the report were so frightening that some members of the committee suggested the possibility of a preventive war while there was still time.<sup>48</sup> To be sure, these conclusions depended largely on Eisenhower's refusal to reveal the information on Soviet ICBM programs that he had acquired through the flights of U-2 planes. In the debate over the 'gap' Kennedy sided with the most hawkish elements. Relying on information provided by the reporter Joe Alsop,<sup>49</sup> and using data received by members of the Eisenhower Administration during his time in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Kennedy continuously stressed Soviet primacy in the arms race.<sup>50</sup>

However, if at the start Kennedy's criticisms might have come from real concerns, they later developed into a dangerous political gamble. By 1960, in fact, scepticism was growing within and outside the Administration about the existence of a gap. General Earl Wheeler had told Kennedy that

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<sup>46</sup> JFK Library, 'Eisenhower on Nixon – JFK Campaign Spot,' [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BSw7JgphFg>] (accessed 9 August 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Matthews, *Kennedy & Nixon*, p. 137.

<sup>48</sup> Andrews, *For the President's*, p. 241.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher A. Preble, "'Who Ever Believed in the 'Missile Gap?'" John F. Kennedy and the Politics of National Security,' *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (December 2003), p. 805.

<sup>50</sup> John L. Helgerson, *CIA Briefing of Presidential candidates*, (Washington: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1996), [<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB116/cia/Chapter%203%20--%20Into%20Politics%20With%20Kennedy%20and%20Johnson.htm>] (accessed 29 August 2013).



there was no missile gap. During the campaign, Jerome Wiesner, a member of Eisenhower's Permanent Science Advisory Committee had warned the candidate and his team to 'downplay' the issue in their campaign.<sup>51</sup> Kennedy, however, understood that the gap was a political winner in the short-term and kept coming back to the same message. Once in office, Kennedy soon received confirmation of the non-existence of the gap. At that point, he found himself trapped by his own statements on the path of re-armament.

Kennedy's predicament was nowhere as much of his own making as in respect of Cuba. Kennedy reserved the harshest attacks for the situation on the island as a symbol of the Eisenhower Administration's failure in containing the spread of Communism. The relationship between John Kennedy and Fidel Castro had started on a surprisingly positive note, with the Senator lamenting the treatment reserved for the Cuban leader during his visit to the US.<sup>52</sup> With the 'tit-for-tat' between Castro and the Eisenhower Administration getting nastier, however, a conciliatory position on Cuba would have been politically untenable for any politician, let alone one who aspired to be President.<sup>53</sup> As on the 'missile gap,' Kennedy decided to position himself at the very opposite extreme.

For Kennedy, Cuba represented an ideal card. It permitted him to respond in kind to Nixon's criticisms and to manage the risks of being attacked from the right. The Nixon camp had criticised Kennedy for the admission that he would have apologised for Powers' U-2 incident,<sup>54</sup> and for the statement that the islands of Quemoy and Matsu should not have been included in the defence of Taiwan. As John Seigenthaler, adviser to the Kennedy brothers, pointed out, to the dismay of the American public the two islands became a

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<sup>51</sup> Preble, 'Who ever', pp. 814-815.

<sup>52</sup> Beschloss, *KvsK*, p. 101.

<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 123.

<sup>54</sup> William Taubman, Sergey Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason (Eds.), *Nikita Khrushchev* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 230.

major foreign policy issue.<sup>55</sup> Kennedy 'won' the first debate, mainly due to the Republican candidate conciliatory approach and to Kennedy's better appearance on TV screens.<sup>56</sup> Still, Kennedy went all out against Cuba to deflect potential criticism. In a speech in Cincinnati on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1960 (one day before the second debate), Kennedy attacked the Eisenhower Administration for permitting the development of a Communist menace 'under our very noses, only 90 miles from our shores.' The hostile relations with Cuba should have been blamed on an Administration that lacked imagination and foresight.<sup>57</sup> In the third debate, however, Nixon brought back the discussion to the islands of Quemoy and Matsu. Kennedy, feeling the pressure, asked Goodwin to 'prepare a real blast on Nixon.' The blast was a statement allegedly never double-checked with the candidate.<sup>58</sup> The statement, made public the day before the fourth debate, read:

We must attempt to strengthen the non-Batista democratic anti-Castro forces...who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far these fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our Government.<sup>59</sup>

The statement landed like a bombshell on the American media and on Nixon.<sup>60</sup> Today, it is still uncertain to what extent Kennedy, as Presidential candidate, had been briefed by CIA Director Allen Dulles and CIA Director for Plans Richard Bissell on the preparations against Cuba. What is certain is that the candidate achieved his short-term goal. The fourth debate, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, was dominated by Cuba. Trying to contest Kennedy, Nixon,

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<sup>55</sup> John Seigenthaler, Phone interview with the author (20 September 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Matthews, *Kennedy & Nixon*, pp. 147-149.

<sup>57</sup> John F. Kennedy, 'Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Cincinnati, Ohio, Democratic Dinner,' 6 October 1960, *The American Presidency Project (APP)*, [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25660>] (accessed 8 August 2013).

<sup>58</sup> Richard Goodwin, *Remembering America* (New York: Little Brown, 1988), p. 134.

<sup>59</sup> John F. Kennedy, 'Statement on Cuba,' October 20, 1960, *APP*, [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=74127>] (accessed 8 August 2013).

<sup>60</sup> Helgerson, *CIA*.

who in private was exercising pressure to speed-up the invasion of Cuba, found himself exposing a relatively moderate position.<sup>61</sup> Nixon knew more but couldn't talk; he simply 'looked bad.'<sup>62</sup>

Kennedy had understood some of the risks involved in making Cuba the main foreign policy issue. In particular, he realised the paper-thin depth of his position. He confessed to Goodwin: 'Of course we don't say how we would have saved Cuba...What the hell, they never told us how they would have saved China.'<sup>63</sup> What he didn't realise, however, were the long-term risks. As Jim Rasenberberg recently put it:

With every word the candidate uttered against the scourge of Fidel Castro, with every argument he made...he was paving a road he would have to follow if and when he became President.<sup>64</sup>

Posturing strong, he had exposed himself to future Republican accusations of weakness and inconsistencies. He had limited his options to a narrow path of confrontation, although some in Moscow and Havana had hoped, perhaps only on the surface, for a relaxation,<sup>65</sup> and he had turned momentarily into the idol of the Cuban exile community. When JFK finally won, CIA's Howard Hunt remembered, 'the Cuban Barrio in Miami went wild with joy.'<sup>66</sup> They would be sorely let down.

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<sup>61</sup> Presidential Candidates Debates, 'Presidential Debate in New York,' 21 October 1960, *APP* [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29403>] (accessed 8 August 2013).

<sup>62</sup> John Nolan, Phone interview with the author, 30 August 2012.

<sup>63</sup> Goodwin, *Remembering*, p. 75.

<sup>64</sup> Rasenberberg, *The Brilliant*, p. 95.

<sup>65</sup> Taubman *et al.*, *Nikita* and Dinerstein, *The making*, p. 131.

<sup>66</sup> Talbot, *Brothers*, p. 70.

### **5.3.2 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 2: The Bay of Pigs, 'military risk' vs. 'political risk'**

After Kennedy's narrow victory, the issues of Cuba and of Soviet gains maintained a key place among the President's concerns. Two weeks before inauguration, Khrushchev gave a speech in which he suggested the possibility of peaceful coexistence with the West. This message, however, was lost on Kennedy. All the future President heard was Khrushchev's pledge of support for 'wars of national liberation' (which was actually meant for Chinese audiences). The speech provided a shock to the incoming president who made it a required reading for his team. The monolithic interpretation of communism added to Khrushchev's message to make of Castro a Soviet puppet and it contributed in turning Cuba into a 'life or death' issue; a status it probably did not deserve.<sup>67</sup>

Kennedy entered office with the willingness to bring new faces, and a new spirit - the bold spirit of the 'New Frontier' - to Washington. Kennedy selected the outsider Robert McNamara, former President of Ford Motor Company, as the new Secretary of Defense. McGeorge Bundy, former Dean of Harvard University, became National Security Adviser. The relatively unknown Dean Rusk became Secretary of State. Adlai Stevenson, a leading figure of the Democratic Party, grudgingly accepted the UN Ambassadorship. A group of young and energetic personnel including Richard Goodwin, other 'action intellectuals' including Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and many others in lower ranks, really suggested that the torch had passed to a new generation. It was also clear that this new generation was sceptical of the older one.

The effort to establish a clear break did not help the Kennedy Administration, especially on Cuba. During the transition, the Kennedy team refused for two months to discuss issues 'at the working level' with the

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<sup>67</sup> Mark J. White, *The Cuban Missile Crisis* (London: MacMillan Press, 1996), pp. 29-32.

outgoing Eisenhower team. Thomas Mann, from the State Department, identified this as a 'major mistake,' depriving Kennedy of time to think the plan through. This sounds particularly important since until November, CIA preparations were at an early stage.<sup>68</sup> As Mann himself admitted on another occasion, Kennedy had several chances to call the project off.<sup>69</sup> But the Administration did not or, perhaps, could not. The easy political gains of the campaign and the need to manage the risks inherent in being outflanked from the right, had led to harsh rhetoric against Castro. Now, Kennedy could not back down, the risks were too great.

Among the reasons for Kennedy's decision to proceed with the plan was certainly his fascination with the CIA and its men.<sup>70</sup> A second element was the Administration's inexperience in terms of process and personnel. The decision-making process was still unstructured and some of its characteristics reflected Kennedy's preference for access, informality and speed.<sup>71</sup> Kennedy, George Ball remembered, was 'the pragmatist *par excellence*,' with a narrow focus on day-to-day results, and a total disregard for long-range implications.<sup>72</sup> This was exemplified by decision-making through Task Forces, although some understood that this choice meant that no one dealt with long-term consequences.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Kennedy also wanted access to the agencies, with no intermediate bodies. In the NSC, Bundy shut down the Operation Coordinating Board – responsible for the integration of policies from various agencies - and other committees,

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<sup>68</sup> Piero Gleijeses, 'Ships in the night: the CIA, the White House, and the Bay of Pigs,' *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (February 1995), pp. 14-15.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Mann, Interview, Oral History Collection, *LBJ Presidential Library*, 4 November 1968 [<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/mann-t/mann.pdf>] (accessed 8 August 2013).

<sup>70</sup> William Colby, *Honorable Men: my life in the CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 180.

<sup>71</sup> Goodwin, *Remembering*, p. 140.

<sup>72</sup> Ball, *The Past*, p. 167.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 84.

blurring the distinction between policy and operations.<sup>74</sup> As Dulles recognised, those devising plans often ended up drawn into an excess of 'salesmanship.'<sup>75</sup> The new team also cancelled several committees established by the Eisenhower Administration to keep track of covert operations.<sup>76</sup> Without work in committees, the various agencies would be responsible for their own work, eschewing open confrontation. Kennedy, for example, asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to review the CIA plan. They gave a very hedged assessment, but, as Dean Rusk wrote, 'they never looked at the plan as professional soldiers,' largely washing their hands of it.<sup>77</sup>

Beyond process, most of the people involved were inexperienced. As Schlesinger wrote, members of the Cabinet listened 'transfixed' to Bissell's presentations,<sup>78</sup> and inexperience was particularly consequential for those opposing the plan.<sup>79</sup> The most inexperienced of all was the President himself.

For a lieutenant JG [junior grade]...in the Second World War, to cancel an expedition that had been advocated, sanctioned and supported by the General who commanded the largest successful amphibious landing in history, would have been hard to explain.<sup>80</sup>

Schlesinger's remark points to the key element in Kennedy's inability to stop the momentum behind the invasion: the risks involved. During the weeks that led to the invasion, three elements stood out: first, many

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<sup>74</sup> Rothkopf, *Running*, p. 85.

<sup>75</sup> Allen W. Dulles, Interview, Oral History Project, *JFK Library*, 5-6 December 1964 [<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKOH-AWD-01.aspx>] (accessed 8 August 2013), p. 24.

<sup>76</sup> John Prados, *Presidents' Secret Wars* (Chicago: Elephat Paperbacks, 1996), p. 194.

<sup>77</sup> Dean Rusk, *As I saw it* (London: Norton and Company, 1990), p. 209, and Alreigh Burke, Memorandum of conversation, 18 April 1961, Doc. 121, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, Vol. X. All cited volumes are available on-line at [<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>].

<sup>78</sup> Schlesinger, *One Thousand*, p. 218.

<sup>79</sup> Blight and Kornbluh, *Politics*, p. 43.

<sup>80</sup> Blight and Kornbluh, *Politics*, p. 64.

advisers and the President himself reasoned - often explicitly - in terms of what could go wrong, that is in terms of risks, both domestically and militarily; second the political risks and strategic risk of the invasion were clearly spelled out for the President; third there is enough evidence to suggest that Kennedy focused on short-term political risks.

The President knew that inaction entailed massive risks on the domestic political side. First, had Kennedy cancelled the plan he would have been accused of weakness and, above all, he would have betrayed his campaign pledges. Kennedy had built his campaign on being tough on the communists and, especially, on Castro. One of the key factors in his mind was the potential public reaction.<sup>81</sup> Second, as CIA Director Allen Dulles pointed out, Kennedy faced a 'disposal problem' what to do with the forces training in Guatemala if they were ordered to disband. Had the force made it back to Miami, rumours would have spread and the Republican Party would have had a field day. Republicans, Bundy later admitted, would have said: 'We were all set to beat Castro...this antsy pantsy bunch of liberals' chickened out; there was a 'political risk in not going through with the operation.'<sup>82</sup> Bissell boldly brought the same point to Kennedy when he presented the plan. He argued that such an operation entailed a willingness to pay a political price. 'The alternative,' he added, 'Would appear to be the demobilization of the paramilitary force...this course of action too involves certain risks.'<sup>83</sup> More generally a show of weakness would have been an unacceptable denial of Kennedy's whole foreign policy approach of vigour and boldness; a risk Kennedy could not take.<sup>84</sup> Action was not risk-free either. A full-fledged invasion meant a willingness to confront risks at the international level. Many of Kennedy's advisers, including Rusk, Goodwin, Schlesinger and Stevenson warned that an invasion, even if successful, would be disastrous for the US international position:

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<sup>81</sup> Destler *et al.*, *Our own*, p. 52.

<sup>82</sup> Gleijeses, 'Ships in the night,' p. 26.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Bissell, 'Revised Cuban Operation,' 15 March 1960, Doc. 61, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>84</sup> Destler *et al.*, *Our own*, p. 52.

The effect will be to spoil the new US image – the image of intelligence, reasonableness and honest firmness which has already had such an extraordinary effect in changing world opinion about the US.<sup>85</sup>

More specifically, in Latin America, the Alliance for Progress was off to a rocky start. The plan aimed at improving the socio-economic situation of countries in the region, and, by doing so, preventing the spread of revolution. An invasion would have brought back ghosts of 'gunboat diplomacy,' would have exposed the plan as a scam, and would have markedly increased risks of social upheaval in the region. Kennedy was all too aware of the risks coming from Latin America and from its unstable governments.<sup>86</sup>

On the strategic side, inaction would have created problems. Once again, Dulles and Bissell presented the plan in terms of what could go wrong if the invasion was called off. As they pointed out, time was running out; Castro would soon have become stronger, with deliveries of weapons from the Soviet Bloc. Furthermore, the 'disposal problem' might have spurred serious troubles in Central America. As Erneido Oliva, one of the commanders of the force admitted,

The problem that we would have created in Guatemala, would have been so great, Cuban fighting the Guatemalan army...the disposal problem...was a BIG problem.<sup>87</sup>

Action, on the other hand, created two main problems on the strategic level. First, several elements within the Administration understood that the plan was too risky, and gave explicit or implicit estimates of the odds of success. The Pentagon had judged the chances of success as 'fair.' With 'fair' the military meant 30% chance of success. The number was never included in the memorandum and 'fair' was generally understood to mean much more

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<sup>85</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Memorandum for the President, 5 April 1961, CMCC, DNSA.

<sup>86</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>87</sup> Bohning, *The Castro*, p. 46.



than that.<sup>88</sup> Chester Bowles tried to convince Rusk to oppose the plan, writing that the chances of success were not greater than one out of three, making the operation 'highly risky.'<sup>89</sup> As Senator William Fulbright (D-AR) wrote to the President, going ahead with the plan entailed the possibility of failure of the invading force. In that case, the US would have been compelled to intervene. An intervention 'would have undone the work of thirty years trying to live down earlier interventions,' and, more problematically, would have made the US responsible for the restoration of order in Cuba, which would have proved an 'endless can of worms.'<sup>90</sup> Beyond the confrontation in Cuba, a full-fledged US invasion would have created a dreadful risk escalation with the USSR. Even if the Soviets decided to let Cuba go, they could have sought their reprisal in Berlin, where Kennedy feared that the Soviets might take advantage of US adventurism to try something similar.<sup>91</sup> Alternatively, the Soviets could have picked Laos, or a trouble spot in the Caribbean where authoritarian long-time allies of the US feared popular unrest and other countries seemed ready to align with Castro.<sup>92</sup> The uncertainty as to possible Soviet reactions ranked highly among Kennedy's concerns.

What this maze made clear was that there was no easy choice. A decision represented trade-offs in which reduction of risks in one sector entailed increased risks in another. Schlesinger lucidly identified the problem for the President:

The trouble with the operation is that the less the military risk, the greater the political risk, and vice versa. It seems to me that

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<sup>88</sup> Memorandum, JCS to Secretary McNamara, 3 February 1961, Doc. 36, *FRUS*, Vol. X; and Rasenberg, *The Brilliant*, p. 118.

<sup>89</sup> David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), p. 67.

<sup>90</sup> Wyden, *Bay*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>91</sup> Frederick Kempe, *Berlin 1961* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), pp. 155-156.

<sup>92</sup> Alex Von Tunzelmann, *Red Heat* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011).

the utilization of the men under conditions of minimum political risk is clearly the thing to aim for.<sup>93</sup>

Kennedy followed Schlesinger's advice. In line with one of the hypotheses identified in the previous chapter, the President took several measures to reduce the political risks of the plan, with little regard for the increase in strategic risks. Kennedy would continue to repeat in meetings that the invasion should have been less spectacular, more as a work of Cubans themselves than as a World War Two style invasion. He imposed an infinite series of restrictions on the CIA, the military and the invading forces. He ordered a change of the landing site from the Trinidad area to the Bay of Pigs. He deprived the invading force of any weapon that might have shown the US hand and, when the first air strikes on the day before the invasion created a political uproar, with the media exposing the CIA cover story and with Stevenson threatening to resign, he called off additional ones.

The reasons for these measures can be found in Kennedy's conviction, in spite of Schlesinger's advice, that it could have been possible to manage the political risks posed by the invasion with no strategic repercussions. Like Johnson in Neustadt's analysis, Kennedy's narrow focus on short-run political tangibles dismissed longer-term risks. In this context, Bissell and Dulles played a key role in convincing the President that, whereas inaction entailed clear risks, the invasion was virtually 'risk-free,' on both the political and the strategic side. For political risks, the American hand could be convincingly hidden, making the invasion look like a genuinely Cuban effort. On the strategic side, they guaranteed that no risk was involved. If the invading force succeeded, it would have ousted Castro, possibly through a general uprising. If it failed to break through or if it was beaten back, Bissell assured, the force could have moved to the Escambray Mountains nearby, starting a guerrilla campaign. Kennedy's impressions were strengthened by the report on the CIA's modified plan submitted in March, after the President had requested changes. In the report, only the positives of the

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<sup>93</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Memorandum for the President, 'Cuba', 15 March 1961, *CMCC*, DNSA.

new plan were identified. The swamp surrounding the landing area, for example, was convincingly portrayed as an insurmountable obstacle for Castro's forces, but no one bothered to admit that it would have represented an equally insurmountable obstacle for any force trying to break out of the beachhead to reach the Escambray Mountains. Equally, no one pointed out that with the new landing site, the mountains were now eighty miles away. As Schlesinger concluded:

Kennedy assumed that the guerrilla option had been left intact by the switch to Zapata. The briefing paper gave him no reason to suppose otherwise.<sup>94</sup>

Few also noticed that the CIA, after more than two years of work on one plan, came up with the modified Zapata (Bay of Pigs) plan in less than three days.<sup>95</sup>

As the invasion went ahead, the 'shock effect' and the surprise that the invasion force should have created were nullified. Castro knew of the CIA plans, which had become public knowledge at least one year before the invasion. The Cuban leader even made this clear in a speech a week before the invasion, when he accused the 'Central Agency of Cretins', of getting ready to attack.<sup>96</sup> The internal uprising never occurred. Castro made sure of it, rounding up one 100,000 suspects as the invasion was taking place.<sup>97</sup> The Cuban brigade, confronted with Castro's forces had no chance of reaching the mountains, surrounded as it was by swamps and with maps, provided by the CIA, that had allegedly been drawn in 1895.<sup>98</sup> The last resort, on which the CIA had banked, never materialised. When PBSUCCESS was under way, and the rebels seemed close to defeat, Bissell had gone to Eisenhower

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<sup>94</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand*, p. 136.

<sup>95</sup> Blight and Kornbluh, *Politics*, p. 26.

<sup>96</sup> Fidel Castro, 'Meeting of Confederation of Cuban Workers', 8 April 1961, *Castro Speech Data Base* [<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610408.html>] (accessed 24 September 2013).

<sup>97</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand*, p. 224.

<sup>98</sup> Tim Weiner, *Legacy of ashes* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 173.

and had convinced the President to let American planes, with pilots hired by the CIA, bomb Guatemalan cities, including the capital. This show of force was crucial in the Operation's success. It is likely that both Bissell and Dulles assumed that Kennedy would have preferred to call the US forces in, instead of accepting failure. Apart from an initial doubt,<sup>99</sup> the President never acceded to insistent CIA and JCS requests to use force.<sup>100</sup> The President had made up his mind.

The end result was a middle way invasion that had, from the start, no chance of success. 'We fell between the stools,' Thomas Mann later lamented.<sup>101</sup> In accepting the invasion and in imposing a series of changes, the administration had managed the political risks that inaction implied. However, it had dismissed short-term strategic risks, such as the failure of the invasion, and the impossibility of masking US responsibility.<sup>102</sup> More crucially, it had also dismissed longer-term ones, such as the damage to American international reputation and the risk of strengthening the Cuban-Soviet bond. In his memoirs, Schlesinger wrote:

The President had insisted that the political and military risks be brought into balance: given the nature of the operation, this was impossible, and someone should have said so.<sup>103</sup>

The rest of the chapter will argue that, until the Missile Crisis, Kennedy's policy towards Cuba was a failing and dangerous attempt to bring into balance military and political risks. And no one told the President either.

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<sup>99</sup> Freedman, *Kennedy's*, p. 144.

<sup>100</sup> Freedman, *Kennedy's*, p. 144.

<sup>101</sup> Mann, Interview, LBJ Oral History, p. 21.

<sup>102</sup> Memorandum No. 3 From the Cuba Study Group to President Kennedy, 'Conclusions of the Cuban Study Group,' 13 June 1961, Doc. 233, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, Vol. X.

<sup>103</sup> Schlesinger, *One Thousand*, pp. 267 and 270.

### 5.3.3 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 3: revenge vs. *modus vivendi*

After the failure, and in line with the cyclical nature of risk management, the situation in Cuba was re-assessed and new risks were identified. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, with the operation collapsing, Robert Kennedy wrote to his brother. 'Our long-range foreign policy objectives in Cuba', he wrote,

Are tied to survival far more than what is happening in...any other place in the world...our objective must be at the very least to prevent that island from becoming Mr. Khrushchev's arsenal.

The path forward was clear. The US needed to increase the pressure on Cuba. He concluded:

The time has come for a showdown for in a year or two years the situation will be vastly worse. If we don't want Russia to set up missile bases in Cuba, we had better decide now what we are willing to do to stop it.<sup>104</sup>

Both Kennedys seemed to interpret the Bay of Pigs as a lost battle in what would have been a long war. Chester Bowles recorded the prevailing anger in his notes of the NSC meetings of those days. In the meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, while the President was 'shattered', comments around the table were savage. Robert Kennedy turned aggressively on Bowles as soon as he suggested that the solution to the present mess was not to double-up on what the US had been doing. There was a frantic search for a programme to grab on to.<sup>105</sup> A complete lack of 'moral integrity' prevailed.<sup>106</sup>

Among this fury, two main visions for the future of the US-Cuba relations battled out. Bowles, Goodwin and officials in the State Department promoted a strategy aiming at a long-term solution. If the US could not live

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<sup>104</sup> Robert Kennedy, Memorandum to the President, 19 April 1961, Doc. 157, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>105</sup> Chester Bowles, Notes on the April 20 Meeting on Cuban Crisis, Doc. 158, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>106</sup> Chester Bowles, Notes on the 478th Meeting of the National Security Council April 22, Doc. 166, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

with Cuba - and some suggested it should - the aim should have been to increase pressure, avoiding any further international humiliation.<sup>107</sup> The Attorney General, McNamara and the President, aimed, conversely, at a quick fix to the problem. Responding to McNamara's request, the JCS prepared an extremely detailed military plan for the overthrow of the Castro government through 'the application of military force.'<sup>108</sup> In mid-May it was already clear which of these schools had won. At the 483<sup>rd</sup> NSC meeting it was 'agreed that US policy toward Cuba should aim at the downfall of Castro'. The meeting set out a series of measures to improve intelligence on Cuba and the relations with the Cuban exiles, but it was also understood that these measures were not sufficient to cause the downfall of Castro. For this reason, it was also

Agreed that the United States should not undertake military intervention in Cuba *now*, but should do nothing that would foreclose the possibility of military intervention in the future.<sup>109</sup>

Kennedy's predicament had not changed from the pre-Bay of Pigs situation: the campaign against Castro posed serious risks. The exiles or the CIA could not overthrow Castro on their own, and US forces should have been used. Kennedy still faced the same strategic risks of confrontation if the US hand became too visible and the same political risks if he tried to learn to live with Cuba. The end result, as with the Bay of Pigs, was a policy falling 'between the stools.' Trapped between the strategic impossibility of an all-out campaign and the political impossibility of establishing a *modus vivendi*, Kennedy proceeded on a path of confrontation, with scant chances of success.

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<sup>107</sup> Memorandum, From the President's Assistant Special Counsel (Goodwin) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), April 26, 1961, Doc. 179, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>108</sup> Memorandum, From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, Doc. 178 *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>109</sup> Record of action of the NSC at its 483<sup>rd</sup> meeting on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1961, *CMCC*, DNSA, italics by the author.

These developments were, at best, unfortunate. In the same days, Castro and the Cuban government were launching a 'peace initiative'. Before the Bay of Pigs, Castro had already let the media know that if US companies agreed to restore the purchases of Cuban sugar, the Cuban government might arrange compensation for their losses. Roger Hilsman from the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research dismissed the offer.<sup>110</sup> On the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, Castro and the Cuban President Dorticos made a statement stressing their willingness to 'participate in any discussion...in order to arrive at a satisfactory solution of the tension.'<sup>111</sup> In May, Castro proved willing to exchange prisoners from the Bay of Pigs invasion for bulldozers (others say farm tractors, most of the confusion was created by Castro's use of the Spanish word *tractores*). Private citizens such as Eleanor Roosevelt picked up the offer, but the US government refused to support it.<sup>112</sup> In mid-June, Castro discussed with a group of American journalists the possibility of compensation for US companies. In July, Carlos Lechuga, Cuban Ambassador to the UN, approached the journalist Tad Szulc, who was well connected to the Kennedys, and admitted that the bad state of Cuban-US relations had made the help from the Soviets inevitable, but 'a friendlier attitude on the part of the US' would have helped the non-Communists elements in the regime.<sup>113</sup> This 'peace initiative', famously culminated in the meeting between Che Guevara and Richard Goodwin, in which the former 'clearly speaking for the Cuban government' admitted that Cuba and the US could have tried to reach a *modus vivendi*.<sup>114</sup> Relating his meeting to Kennedy, Goodwin suggested the President should:

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<sup>110</sup> Roger Hilsman, Memorandum to CIA Director Allen Dulles, 'Castro "offer" to discuss indemnification of nationalized US property,' 10 March, 1961, CIA CREST

[[http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP80B01676R000800090057-5.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/5829/CIA-RDP80B01676R000800090057-5.pdf)] (accessed 29 August 2013).

<sup>111</sup> White, *The Cuban*, p. 52.

<sup>112</sup> Circular Telegram From the Department of State to All Posts, May 20, 1961, 5, Doc. 224, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>113</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Tad Szulc-Carlos Lechuga, July 13, 1961, Doc. 246, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>114</sup> Dick Goodwin, Memorandum for the President, 'Conversation with Comandante Ernesto Guevara of Cuba', 22 August 1961, *CMCC*, DNSA.

Pay little public attention to Cuba. Do not allow them to appear as the victims of US aggression. Do not create the impression that we are obsessed with Castro – an impression which only strengthens Castro's hand.<sup>115</sup>

By the time Goodwin wrote those words, however, it was already too late.

### **5.3.4 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 4: showing 'weakness' vs. raising the stakes**

#### *5.3.4.1 Trade-off 4a: tough with the Soviets vs. cornering Khrushchev*

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1961, Kennedy met with Khrushchev in Vienna. During the summit, President Kennedy let Khrushchev drag him into an ideological discussion and no specific issue was addressed. The summit had been a tough lesson for the President. After living through the 'worst experience' of his life, Kennedy confessed to the reporter James Reston his main fear for the post-Vienna relations between the US and the USSR:

I think he did it because of the Bay of Pigs. I think he thought that anyone who was so young and inexperienced as to get into that mess could be taken, and anyone who got into it, and didn't see it through had no guts. So he just beat the hell out of me. So I've got a terrible problem. If he thinks I'm inexperienced and have no guts, until we remove those ideas we won't get anywhere with him.<sup>116</sup>

Demonstrating resolve became the new imperative. The President had already increased the US level of armament in his decision to shift US nuclear posture from Mutual Assured Destruction to 'flexible response.'<sup>117</sup> Now, he took measures and adopted policies aimed at demonstrating an even more aggressive approach towards the Soviet Union. Managing the

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<sup>115</sup> Dick Goodwin, Memorandum for the President, 22 August 1961, *CMCC*, DNSA.

<sup>116</sup> David Reynolds, *Summits: six meetings that shaped the Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 195.

<sup>117</sup> Bundy, *Danger*.



risks of appearing weak meant that he had to raise the stakes of the Cold War.<sup>118</sup>

In June, Kennedy humiliated Khrushchev during a press conference by exposing the weaknesses of the Soviet economy.<sup>119</sup> When Khrushchev renewed his ultimatum on Berlin, Kennedy went on TV on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July with a bold address to the nation. He increased military spending by over \$3 billion, 'dispatched reinforcements to Europe, tripled draft calls, and mobilised reserves and national guardsmen.'<sup>120</sup> On the 21<sup>st</sup> of October he famously let the Soviets know through Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric that if a missile gap existed, it was in the US favour. In the same days, at a lunch with Soviet Ambassador to the US Mikhail Menshikov, Paul Nitze boasted that 'there would be nothing left of the Soviet Union after an American nuclear strike,' making a similar point in a public speech.<sup>121</sup> The humiliation went beyond simple statements. One of the key factors convincing Khrushchev to deploy the missiles was the willingness to give the Americans 'back some of their own medicine,'<sup>122</sup> that is to get revenge for the American deployment of missiles in Turkey. On this issue, as with the Bay of Pigs and the ignored peace initiative, political risks and the willingness not to appear weak, led to the dismissal of long-term strategic risks.

The deployment of nuclear missiles in Europe had been decided upon by the Eisenhower Administration as a way of strengthening the NATO alliance after the bruises of the Suez Crisis and *Sputnik*. Many soon realised that the Jupiters were obsolete and would probably do more harm than good. As with the Bay of Pigs, the buck passed to the Kennedy Administration: the

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<sup>118</sup> Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 23.

<sup>119</sup> Beschloss, *KvsK*, p. 240.

<sup>120</sup> White, *The Cuban*, p. 74.

<sup>121</sup> Lebow and Stein, *We all lost*, p. 37.

<sup>122</sup> Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *'One Hell of a gamble': the secret history of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (London: Norton and Company, 1997), p. 184.

deployment could have still been called off. In February, Kennedy had established a task force under Dean Acheson to study the issue. The task force identified concerns with the missiles and suggested that the US should have made clear to Turkey that the money spent for the Jupiters could have been spent in a more cost-effective way. The Polaris nuclear submarines were getting ready and they would have provided a better nuclear deterrent. In March, Kennedy asked the head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, George McGhee, former Ambassador to Turkey, if the Turks would allow cancellation of the deployment. In spite of McGhee's scepticism, the Administration seemed to move towards a cancellation. Vienna changed everything.<sup>123</sup> Asked an opinion immediately after the summit, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe sent a telegram to McNamara. The deployment, he wrote:

Was considered important militarily, but was perhaps of even greater significance from a psychological or political standpoint...I believe the program continues to be of value...this is the time to create strength, not reduce it.<sup>124</sup>

In a meeting convened to discuss the deployment, everybody agreed. Secretary of State Rusk admitted that the talks in Vienna compelled a change in US approach. Paul Nitze thought that Vienna had reinforced the desirability of going ahead and that it was unwise to ask the Turks to reconsider. The deployment proceeded.

During the Cuban Missile crisis, Kennedy famously seemed to have lost track of the Jupiter decision.<sup>125</sup> Yet, it seems clear that the President took the decision to continue with the deployment of the missiles after considering the negative implications of a cancellation. Kennedy refused to

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<sup>123</sup> See Philp Nash, *The other missiles of October* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>124</sup> Telegram From the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (Norstad) to Secretary of Defense McNamara, Doc. 363, FRUS, Vol. XVI, [<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v16/ch8>] (accessed 9 August 2013).

<sup>125</sup> Graham Allison used the episode as one of the main exhibit for the strength of his 'Organisational Model.' See Allison, *The Essence*.

accept the risk of appearing weak and the political risks of upsetting the Turks.<sup>126</sup> It is also clear, that in taking the decision, the Administration had dismissed clear warnings. Soviet officials at various levels had made clear their concern. In January 1960, Soviet Ambassador to Turkey Nikiu Rijov had complained to Turkish authorities that the deployment of the missiles represented a 'dangerous adventure.' The message had reached the State Department.<sup>127</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the Bay of Pigs, Khrushchev had written an irate letter to Kennedy in which he accused the US of aggression. After Kennedy's defiant reply, the Soviet Prime Minister wrote back, establishing an analogy between Cuba and Turkey.<sup>128</sup> In Vienna, Khrushchev made the analogy explicit. He asked Kennedy how could a tiny island such as Cuba be a threat to the United States. And added: 'What about Turkey and Iran?...They have US bases and rockets. If the US believes that it is free to act then what should the USSR do?'<sup>129</sup>

To what extent Khrushchev feared the presence of missiles in Turkey is still unknown. The Soviet Premier's son admitted that his father was 'less troubled by the military implications of the Jupiters, than by the political inequality they represented.' The uselessness of the weapon offended him.<sup>130</sup> What is certain is that with his inflamed rhetoric, with the public humiliation, and with the decision to deploy (the first battery became operative on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October in the midst of the Missile Crisis), Kennedy discounted long-term risks, in an effort to manage short-term ones. Developments in Cuba equally seemed to promise confrontation.

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<sup>126</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 'IRBMs for Turkey,' Doc. 365, FRUS, Vol. XVI.

<sup>127</sup> Letter From the charge in Turkey (Cowles) to the Deputy Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Council (Thurston), Doc. 358, FRUS Vol. XVI.

<sup>128</sup> Letter From Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy  
Moscow, April 22, 1961, Doc. 11, *FRUS*, Volume VI, 1961-1963, Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchanges  
[<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v06/comp1>]  
(accessed 9 August 2013).

<sup>129</sup> Nash, *The Other*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>130</sup> Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost*, p. 46.

#### *5.3.4.2 Trade-off 4b: Operation Mongoose and the new risk-free illusion*

Nine days after the Vienna summit, the Taylor Commission (including Robert Kennedy, Dulles and Gen. Maxwell Taylor) presented its report on the Bay of Pigs invasion. The report made two main points. First, it warned the President: 'there can be no long-term living with Castro as a neighbor.'<sup>131</sup> The second point correctly exposed the main contradictions in the Bay of Pigs plan. An operation as big as the Bay of Pigs could not have been 'prepared and conducted in such a way that all U.S. support of it and connection with it could be plausibly disclaimed.' Plausible deniability had ceased to exist as early as November 1960. 'Once the need for the operation was established, its success should have had the primary consideration.'<sup>132</sup> The lesson was clear, and similar to the one Schlesinger had offered: reconciling the political and strategic risks of the operation was impossible; the President should have chosen which way to go.

He did not. The Administration's reaction to the report was paradoxical. Kennedy stripped the CIA of the oversight of Cuban operations, but he didn't scrap the plans. The President brought changes to his Administration and put himself more strongly in charge of foreign policy, placing loyal advisers in key positions. Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operation and critic of Kennedy's management of the Bay of Pigs, retired in August 1961. General Maxwell Taylor was called back to duty and given the post of military representative to the President. Taylor and Robert Kennedy were added to the Special Group to create the Special Group Augmented. CIA Director Allen Dulles was substituted by John McCone, a hard-line Republican selected, in spite of doubts as to his suitability for the job, to

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<sup>131</sup> Memorandum No. 4 From the Cuba Study Group to President Kennedy, 'Recommendations of the Cuban Study Group', 13 June 1961, Doc. 234, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>132</sup> Memorandum No. 3 From the Cuba Study Group to President Kennedy, 'Conclusions of the Cuban Study Group,' 13 June 1961, Doc. 233, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

cover Kennedy's right-flank.<sup>133</sup> With these changes out of the way, the Administration decided to step up its operations against Cuba.

During the summer of 1961, military plans on Cuba were developed and refined, the possibility of including Cuban exiles within the US army was taken into account and psychological warfare operations were stepped up. There is convincing evidence that the US government might have been re-considering the assassination of Fidel Castro.<sup>134</sup> As the Church Committee would later uncover, National Security Action memorandum 100 requested the State Department to prepare contingencies for the elimination of Castro, and the Department of Defense to prepare an invasion in that event.<sup>135</sup> This evidence is baffling not only in moral terms, but also in practical ones. In the same period, most agencies of government were advising that the assassination of Castro would have had limited impact. The Pentagon concluded that the demise of Castro would not have freed Cuba from communist influence; even worse, it could have created a 'martyrdom effect.'<sup>136</sup> A NIE reached similar conclusions in November.<sup>137</sup> Once again, the Administration went down a path that had little chance of success from the start. Everyone was 'hysterical,' McNamara would recall.<sup>138</sup> Hysteria would soon reach a whole new level.

At an NSC meeting on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the President authorised the creation of a new programme designed to undermine Castro, codenamed Operation Mongoose. The plan coincided perfectly with Kennedy's priorities. It

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<sup>133</sup> Barret and Holland, *Blind*, p. 3 and Seigenthaler, Phone interview with the author.

<sup>134</sup> Freedman, *Kennedy's*, p. 151.

<sup>135</sup> Church Committee, *Alleged Assassination plots involving foreign leaders*, 1975, p. 135 [[http://history-matters.com/archive/contents/church/contents\\_church\\_reports\\_ir.htm](http://history-matters.com/archive/contents/church/contents_church_reports_ir.htm)] (accessed 9 August 2013).

<sup>136</sup> Memorandum for Mr. Park F. Wollan, 'What would happen if Castro died?' 6 October 1961, CMCC, DNSA.

<sup>137</sup> CIA, 'The situation and prospects in Cuba,' National Intelligence Estimate, 28 November 1961, CMCC, DNSA.

<sup>138</sup> Church Committee, *Alleged*, pp. 140-141.

represented a clandestine effort that promised big results with little US exposure. More specifically, like the landing force that could easily have turned into a guerrilla force, Mongoose was presented as virtually 'risk-free.' Robert Kennedy wrote, describing the program:

My idea is to stir things up on island with espionage, sabotage, general disorder...Do not know if we will be successful in overthrowing Castro but we have nothing to lose in my estimate.<sup>139</sup>

Richard Goodwin concurred: 'the beauty of such an operation...is that we cannot lose,' he wrote to the President.<sup>140</sup> To be sure, there was no beauty in Mongoose and it was far from risk-free.

General Edward Lansdale, having earned his reputation in the Philippines and South East Asia, was called back to Washington to head Mongoose. The Kennedys had a sense of fascination with him, not different from their previous fascination with Bissell. Furthermore, Lansdale's appointment could take the action out of the CIA's hands after the Bay of Pigs debacle.<sup>141</sup> The extent of Operation Mongoose is hard to grasp. The plan consisted of six main phases. From Phase I, the start of the operations, in March 1962, to Phase VI in October 1962 with the 'touchdown play,' the overthrow of the regime. To this, Lansdale added 32 very specific tasks assigned to the various agencies of government. The State Department should have looked into the possibility of isolating Cuba within the hemisphere. The Pentagon should have continued the development of contingency plans for invasion and internal uprising. The CIA should have conducted sabotage operations and improved intelligence collection.

The plan seemed well structured and, at face value, convincing. But there were several problems with it. The first problem was that most of the

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<sup>139</sup> Doc. 270, Editorial Note, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>140</sup> Richard Goodwin, Memorandum for the President, 11 November 1961, *CMCC*, DNSA.

<sup>141</sup> Talbot, *Brothers*, p. 97.

people involved, from CIA Director John McCone<sup>142</sup> to the Cuban exiles actually disagreed with the project, and thought that success was unlikely.<sup>143</sup> Second, Lansdale soon lost control of his own creation. The CIA kept trying (and failing) in its sabotage efforts and assassination attempts, some including the Mafia. The Joint Chiefs kept on developing more and more aggressive military contingencies, and part of the Department of Defense, certainly spurred on by Lansdale, went on what can only be defined as a 'covert action binge.' On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, Brigadier General William Craig sent a memorandum to Lansdale with the title 'Ideas in support of the project'. The ideas, aimed at harassing and discrediting Castro, had intriguing names such as 'Operation "Phantom"', 'Operation "True Blue,"' 'Operation "Good time,"' but demonstrated little beyond a fervid imagination. Lansdale himself suggested operation 'Elimination by Illumination' according to which convincing Cubans of the second coming of Christ would have led to the ousting of Castro.

The third problem with the whole Operation, the problem that had besieged the Kennedy Administration from the start when it came to Cuba, was the contradiction between political risks and strategic risks. First, as Sam Halpern would later argue there was a 'basic contradiction' in the Administration's policy:

Things were supposed to be quiet. Not a lot of publicity, just a lot of damage inflicted on the Cuban regime. However – and this is the contradiction – they also wanted 'boom and bang.'

Robert Kennedy would repeatedly accuse the CIA and others of not doing enough about Cuba. And yet, as soon as some efforts succeeded and, inevitably, made the news, Robert Kennedy savagely attacked CIA officials for embarrassing the Administration.<sup>144</sup> The CIA was soon resentful of this

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<sup>142</sup> John McCone, 'Memorandum for the record,' 12 January 1961, Doc. 287, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>143</sup> Robert A. Hurwitch, Memorandum of Conversation, Doc. 308, *FRUS* Vol. X.

<sup>144</sup> Blight and Kornbluh, *Politics*, p. 114.

double-track approach.<sup>145</sup> Second, the plan was geared more towards political needs than strategic realities. Lansdale, always able in telling the Kennedys what they wanted to hear,<sup>146</sup> had assured the President that everything would have been over by October 1962. As Halpern concluded: 'You don't have to be a magician or a brain surgeon to figure [the connection between] a big victory parade in Havana' and the November Congressional elections. On paper, the plan seemed perfect; it looked 'marvellous', except it had 'no connection with reality.'<sup>147</sup> And, it should be added, it was fraught with risks, and once again no one told the President.

### **5.3.5 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 5: Plans of invasion vs. Cold War sensitivity and 'crisis avoidance'**

In January, as Lansdale worked on his Cuban project, Kennedy had agreed to be interviewed by Alexei Adzhubei, Khrushchev's son in law. Asked why the US government was so fixated with Cuba, Kennedy immediately stressed the political risks that the Cuban issue posed: 'If I run for re-election and the Cuban question remains as it is – Cuba will be the main problem of the campaign [and] we will have to do something.' He added that Cuba was as important for the US as Hungary was for the USSR. As Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali suggest, the 'Hungary analogy' created a shock in Moscow. Soviet authorities concluded that the US aimed at invasion.<sup>148</sup> Robert Kennedy was equally insensitive in a conversation with his Soviet contact, and (unknown to Kennedy) KGB agent, Georgi Bolshakov. He confessed that the President was under enormous pressure from the JCS and that 'in extremis' the US might have had to 'probe' the Soviet forces. In Moscow, these words set-off alarms of pre-emptive strike.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Talbot, *Brothers*, p. 95.

<sup>146</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *'One Hell of a gamble,'* p. 148.

<sup>147</sup> Bohning, *The Castro*, p. 84.

<sup>148</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>149</sup> Evan Thomas, *Robert Kennedy* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), p. 206.



In February and March scepticism about Mongoose had grown. The Administration, however, seemed to move towards a more bellicose position, relying openly on military might. General Lyman Lemnitzer, Chairman of the JCS, replied to McNamara's enquiries suggesting that a military action on Cuba could be easily justified. A fake attack on Guantanamo, or a 'remember the Maine' type of incident could be staged. The US could also have blamed a Cuban MiG for the downing of a US civilian airplane.<sup>150</sup> The military, Robert Kennedy was told, believed that the presence of Castro in the hemisphere was unacceptable. Without intervention the Soviets could have easily taken 'a page' from the US book to establish a base in Cuba. The Pentagon and the JCS were drafting contingency plans for an invasion. To reduce the reaction time, the pre-positioning of forces and material was already under way. In the briefing it was stressed that in case an internal revolt became impossible, the military should have supported a 'Cover and Deception' plan, to convince Cuban authorities that an invasion was actually under way. This might have created a rushed reaction, freeing the US from the need to find a pretext for invasion.<sup>151</sup>

The military plans were tested in a series of unprecedented military exercises in March-April 1962. Between the 9<sup>th</sup> of April and the 24<sup>th</sup> the Marines carried out *Lantphibex I-62*, a massive amphibious landing against the Island of Vieques, Puerto Rico. From the 19<sup>th</sup> of April to the 11<sup>th</sup> of May, another exercise, *Quick Kick*, simulating an invasion of Cuba, involved more than 40000 troops, 300 aircraft and seventy-nine ships.<sup>152</sup> In the summer two others would be carried out *Jupiter Springs*, the airborne component of the invasion of Cuba, and *Swift Strike II*, the largest peace-time war game ever.<sup>153</sup> As McNamara would admit twenty-five years later, no one thought,

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<sup>150</sup> Lyman Lemnitzer, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, 'Justifications for US intervention in Cuba,' 13 March 1961, *CMCC*, DNSA.

<sup>151</sup> Briefing for Mr. Robert Kennedy, 21 March 1962, *CMCC*, DNSA.

<sup>152</sup> Raymond Garthoff, 'The Cuban Missile Crisis: an overview' in Nathan (Ed.), *The Cuban*, p. 43.

<sup>153</sup> Lebow and Stein, *We all lost*, p. 26.

at the time, how the Cubans or the Soviets would perceive these exercises. Some were even eager for a confrontation. Gen. William Gray stated that: 'If Soviet agents picked up rumblings of these [invasion] plans, perhaps they...would consider them evidence of intent. So much the better.' He was pleased that the plans focused communists' attention on saving Castro more than exporting revolution.<sup>154</sup>

The Soviet decision to send the missiles to Cuba was taken precisely in the spring of 1962. Both Khrushchev and Castro by that time feared a second Bay of Pigs, this time backed by full US support. To reach this conclusion they could rely on several pieces of evidence. Castro later argued that 6 months before the crisis (that is, April 1962), Cuba had received 'an accumulation of information that a new invasion was being prepared.'<sup>155</sup> First, the Cubans were more than aware of the extent and purposes of the military exercises. Second, in spite of Castro's repression, 3000 rebels were hiding in the Escambray Mountains (ten times more than Castro had needed for his revolution). Raul Castro feared a 'second civil war.'<sup>156</sup> Third, the State Department had also been quite active against Cuba. The embargo strengthened by the Kennedy Administration had crippled the Cuban economy. Internationally, Cuba was more isolated than ever. At the Punta del Este meeting, the US had managed to convince other countries within the Organisation of American States to expel Cuba from the organisation and to declare 'Marxism-Leninism' incompatible with life in the Western Hemisphere. Work was being done to develop a legal cover for a possible invasion.<sup>157</sup> When Cuba communicated this information to the Soviets,

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<sup>154</sup> Anatoli Gribkov (Gen.) and William Smith (Gen.), *Operation Anadyr* (Chicago: Edition Q, 1994), p. 91

<sup>155</sup> Jean Daniel, 'Unofficial envoy: an historic report from two capitals,' *The New Republic*, 14 December 1963, [[http://karws.gso.uri.edu/JFK/history/wc\\_period/pre-wcr\\_reactions\\_to\\_assassination/pre-wcr\\_reactions\\_by\\_the\\_left/TNR--Unofficial\\_envoy.html](http://karws.gso.uri.edu/JFK/history/wc_period/pre-wcr_reactions_to_assassination/pre-wcr_reactions_by_the_left/TNR--Unofficial_envoy.html)] (accessed 9 August 2013).

<sup>156</sup> Beschloss, *KvsK*, p. 374.

<sup>157</sup> Walt W. Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power* (New York: MacMillan, 1972), p. 219.

Moscow started to link this with Kennedy's Hungary reference. Both Havana and Moscow concluded that an invasion was approaching. Several Soviet officials agreed that the defence of Cuba was the primary reason for the missiles' deployment and they were not afraid to admit that 'irrational' and 'emotional' reasons might have been behind the decision.<sup>158</sup> As Anastas Mikoyan confided to Dean Rusk:

You Americans must understand what Cuba means to us old Bolsheviks. We have been waiting all our lives for a country to go Communist without the Red Army, and it happened in Cuba. It makes us feel like boys again.<sup>159</sup>

The unacceptability of losing Cuba convinced Khrushchev to make an unprecedented Soviet move. Certainly, Khrushchev had in mind Berlin, the missiles in Turkey, the nuclear balance and, perhaps, his domestic difficulties, although the latter was completely discounted by Soviet officials.<sup>160</sup> The Kennedy Administration's policies on the Jupiters had already made deployment more likely. If we include - and it is impossible to do otherwise - the defence of Cuba among the reasons behind the deployment, it becomes clear how 'ugly' and ridden with long-term risks Mongoose and Kennedy's policies towards Cuba were.

There is evidence, in fact, that the Kennedy Administration never really considered invading Cuba, that the Administration might have had plans,

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and Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Goodwin) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson), Doc. 302, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>158</sup> Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, p. 234.

<sup>159</sup> Lebow and Stein, *We all lost*, p. 28.

<sup>160</sup> Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, p. 237. Sergo Mikoyan has argued that Khrushchev's main concern was the defence of the island as a way to prevent an alteration of the balance of power. More specifically, Khrushchev was a 'romantic' and he interpreted Cuba as a sign of the future triumph of communism over capitalism. Mikoyan suggests that the nuclear balance and Berlin might have been considerations made by the military and the diplomats respectively, but that these concerns did not play any part in the initial deployment decision. Mikoyan, *The Soviet-Cuban*, p. 98.

but it had no intention to invade,<sup>161</sup> and that Mongoose was a 'psychological salve for inaction.'<sup>162</sup> If we believe these statements, and the evidence seems to point in this direction, the Kennedy Administration kept on stretching its muscles on Cuba for domestic political reasons. These compelled Kennedy to appear strong with Cuba and to face down Khrushchev's challenges. As some have argued: 'Lansdale's Cuba show, starbursts and all, was supposed to dazzle the American people,' and the critics of the Administration.<sup>163</sup> Kennedy, however, was aware of the strategic risks entailed in the decisive action called for by the military. As with the Bay of Pigs, the President settled for a useless and dangerous third way: doing too little to solve the problem of Cuba, but just enough to alarm the Cubans and the Soviets.

### **5.3.6 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 6: domestic pressures and international embarrassment vs. 'crisis readiness'**

In the summer, evidence of a Soviet military build-up in Cuba started to emerge. Officials met to review Mongoose after its Phase I. With even Lansdale growing sceptical of the possibility of inciting revolt without a clear US commitment,<sup>164</sup> this could have been a good moment to close the operation altogether. Once again, the Administration chose a middle way measure continuing a low-level campaign against Cuba with the 'modified' plan B. Attempts at killing Castro continued.<sup>165</sup> The approval of the new course seemed to boost all the rivalries that had been muted in the previous months. With increasing reports of Soviet shipments to Cuba, some started to think that it was time to get tough. In a Special Group Augmented meeting, two visions seemed to battle out. McNamara expressed 'strong feelings' that every possible aggressive action should have been considered. The Attorney General also considered the possibility of a staged attack on

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<sup>161</sup> Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*.

<sup>162</sup> Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, p. 249.

<sup>163</sup> Talbot, *Brothers*, p. 99.

<sup>164</sup> Brig. Gen. Lansdale, Memorandum for the SG(A), 'Review of Operation Mongoose,' 25 July, 1962, *CMCC*, DNSA.

<sup>165</sup> Editorial Note, Doc. 371, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

Guantanamo to give the US a pretext. In spite of these isolated explosions, McCone was frustrated at the Administration's unwillingness to step-up the game. In particular, he noted that both Bundy and the State Department were still pointing out the possible repercussions of any rushed decision on Cuba. Their main concern was the uncertainty as to a possible Soviet reaction; surprisingly they linked American actions in Cuba with possible Soviet actions elsewhere, but they failed to consider Soviet reactions in Cuba itself.<sup>166</sup>

Within the Administration, uncertainty remained as to Soviet intentions when it came to the missiles. Schlesinger wrote to Bundy that, contrary to previous evidence, it appeared that Raul Castro's visit to Moscow in the spring had been extremely successful and that the USSR had decided to make a 'major investment' in Cuba. A Current Intelligence Memorandum read that the speed and magnitude of the influx of personnel and material from a Bloc country to a non-Bloc one was 'unprecedented.'<sup>167</sup> The CIA warned that the Soviet stakes in Cuba had increased dramatically. Cuba could have provided the Soviets with a military base from which to threaten the US. Discussing the reasons behind this action, the CIA admitted that the Soviet's 'chief motive' for a possible deployment would be the defence of the island from a US invasion.<sup>168</sup> All these documents, however, after identifying unprecedented movements of material, and a perfectly good rationale for the USSR to install missiles in Cuba, discounted the possibility of the deployment. The USSR, it was argued, recognised that such a decision would have been far too provocative and such a move would have been unprecedented. Many had noticed that the Soviet commitment in itself was unprecedented but had failed to make the connection. The Administration

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<sup>166</sup> John McCone, Memorandum for the file, 'Discussion in Rusk's Office', 21 August 1962, Doc. 382, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>167</sup> Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Schlesinger) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), Doc. 383, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>168</sup> Memorandum From the Central Intelligence Agency Operations Officer for Operation, 'Operation Mongoose - The Soviet Stake in Cuba', 17 August, 1962, Doc. 379, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

was also blindsided by personal contacts. Soviet Ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin was unaware of the deployment. Even more crucial, Robert Kennedy had naively come to trust his backdoor contact Georgi Bolshakov. Bolshakov had already betrayed RFK's trust when he had convinced the President's brother – and hence the President – of the possibility of mollifying Khrushchev before the Vienna Summit. Now, the KGB agent guaranteed that the USSR would not deploy offensive weapons.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, the President had also relied on Premier Khrushchev's promises that there would be no developments before the election. As Robert Kennedy would later confess to Dobrynin, the President had 'staked his political career' on Soviet promises.<sup>170</sup> Only McCone would continue to repeat warnings of imminent Soviet missiles in Cuba throughout the summer and autumn, but his reports were dismissed as too politicised.

In this context, rumours and the clear rivalries emerging within the Administration soon led to leaks<sup>171</sup> and to public pressure to do more on Cuba. Senator Homer Capehart (R-Ind.) was the first to launch a public alarm on the Soviet build-up and to accuse the President of inaction.<sup>172</sup> On the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, Republican Senator from New York Kenneth Keating took the floor of the Senate openly to attack the Administration regarding the Soviet build-up. 'More ominous reports,' Keating stated, 'suggest that the Soviets are constructing missile bases and sending over technicians to man them.' Other reports he argued, suggest that they might be aiming at

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<sup>169</sup> Andrews, *For the President's*, p. 278.

<sup>170</sup> Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence* (New York: Times Books, 1995), p. 81. These pledges also represented a curious replay of Kennedy's pledges to Khrushchev regarding the absence of any plan to invade Cuba just before the Bay of Pigs. See Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's*, p. 347. See also: National Security Archives, 'Audio clips from the Kennedy White House,' 27 October 1962, [[http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba\\_mis\\_cri/audio.htm](http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/audio.htm)] (accessed 29 August 2013)

<sup>171</sup> White, *The Cuban*, p. 99

<sup>172</sup> Montague Kern, Patricia W. Levering, and Ralph B. Levering, *The Kennedy Crises* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 107.

disturbing US operations at Cape Canaveral (a point made by McCone in a meeting a few days earlier).<sup>173</sup> Other Senators jumped on Keating's train. Senator Goldwater, who in 1962 had written *Why not Victory?* a book calling for the elimination of communism from the Western hemisphere,<sup>174</sup> described Kennedy as weak, 'a very poor poker player,' and a traitor to the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>175</sup> Bob Dole, war hero and first-time Republican Senator from Kansas, joined the chorus, charging that the Administration was letting the Soviets establish a base in Cuba.<sup>176</sup> The environment got extremely excited. Keating came to represent political, media and public frenzy towards the missiles. Several newspapers and magazines, including the *Examiner*, the *New Republic*, and *Tribune* attacked the Administration even invoking a Kennedy favourite, the Munich analogy. Leading journalists such as Arthur Krock of the *New York Times* were equally critical telling the public that a crisis was approaching.<sup>177</sup> The Senate held emergency meetings of the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees, and passed a Resolution (86-1) sanctioning the use of force to counter Cuban belligerence and subversion in the Western hemisphere.<sup>178</sup>

The Kennedy Administration was cornered.<sup>179</sup> Secretly, the Administration was still relying on Mongoose, shifting its focus from concerns over the Soviet build-up, to its long-term goal of removing Castro. Under attack from several quarters, in early September Kennedy sent a request to Congress for a 'stand-by authority' to call up 150,000 reservists, and gave the order to start the pre-positioning of material in Florida. These moves further

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<sup>173</sup> Thomas G. Paterson, 'The Historian as Detective: Senator Kenneth Keating, the Missiles in Cuba, and His Mysterious Sources,' *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 11, No.1 (1987), pp. 67-70.

<sup>174</sup> Blight and Kornbluh, *Politics*, p. 125.

<sup>175</sup> Jack Raymond, 'Goldwater calls Cuba policy weak,' *The New York Times*, 15 September 1962.

<sup>176</sup> Barrett and Holland, *Blind*, p. 12.

<sup>177</sup> Kern et al., *The Kennedy*, p. 110, and Beschloss, *KvsK*, p. 415.

<sup>178</sup> White, *The Cuban*, p. 106.

<sup>179</sup> Thomas G. Paterson and William G. Brophy, 'October Missiles and November elections: the Cuban Missile Crisis and American politics, 1962,' *Journal of American History*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (June 1986), p. 87.

increased the Soviet invasion scare, convincing Khrushchev to add the tactical nuclear missiles, Tatyana's, to the Soviet deliveries.<sup>180</sup> With public tension rising and with the military repeatedly tasked to develop contingency plans for a possible invasion of Cuba, the Administration had still time to mismanage the risks involved in the Cuba issue. The choices made gave, once again, precedence to short-term and domestic political risks, and to US appearances, but considerably affected the ability to detect the missiles, and the President's freedom of choice once they were discovered.

First, with Congressional elections approaching, the Republican Party had made clear that Cuba, which had always represented the 'administration's heaviest political cross,' would be the key issue.<sup>181</sup> On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, Robert Kennedy confessed to his brother his fears of future developments. In particular, he warned the President of the probability that something could go wrong in the future; of future risks. 'I don't think,' he argued, 'that this is just a question about what we are going to do about this [now]. I think it's a question of Cuba in the future...eventually it's very likely that they will establish a naval base for submarines, or that they'll put surface-to-surface missiles in.'<sup>182</sup> Bundy and Rusk disagreed with such prediction suggesting that it was unlikely based on past Soviet behaviour.<sup>183</sup> The President focused on the short-term risks posed by Cuba. In spite of clear warnings from McNamara that statements on the Soviet build-up might have been used later to attack the President or to constrain his options,<sup>184</sup> Kennedy and other members of the Administration went on the record trying to stop the tide of criticisms. Kennedy replayed the 1960 campaign

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<sup>180</sup> Michael Dobbs, *One minute to midnight* (London: Arrow Books, 2009), p. 59.

<sup>181</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 739.

<sup>182</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's*, p. 453.

<sup>183</sup> This assessment missed what at the time was an 'unknown unknown.' The USSR had moved medium range missiles to East Germany during the Berlin crisis in the Spring of 1959. See Zubok, *A failed*, p. 144.

<sup>184</sup> Ernest May and Philip Zelikow, *The Kennedy tapes*, (London: Norton and Company, 2002), p. 4.



with strong statements on Cuba to dodge political risks. On the same day, he publicly affirmed that the Soviet weapons in Cuba were only defensive, if offensive weapons were to be discovered, the 'gravest issues would arise.'<sup>185</sup> On the 13<sup>th</sup>, he stated that the White House would have done anything to protect US security. Some have criticised these statements for being too vague and for failing in deterring Khrushchev.<sup>186</sup> The real problems would emerge in the longer-term. A frustrated Kennedy admitted in the first ExComm meeting that those statements had trapped him. In a dangerous boomerang effect, the political risks that he had tried to fend-off, had come back to haunt him:

Last month I said we weren't going to [allow it]. Last month I should have said that we don't care. But when we said we are not going to, and then they go ahead and do it, and then we do nothing, then...our risks increase...They've got enough to blow us up anyway. I just think it's just a question of...a political struggle as much as military.<sup>187</sup>

McNamara would concur. 'This is a domestic political problem', he admitted.<sup>188</sup> The missiles did not change the military balance, but represented a political move that the President had to reverse.<sup>189</sup> Kennedy recognised that the discovery of the missiles was a 'horror,' embarrassing him before the elections. Furthermore, after the quarantine decision, Kennedy would return to the point, suggesting that he had no other alternative, suggesting that leaving the Soviet challenge unanswered – after he had pledge to take strong countermeasures - would have meant impeachment.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> President Kennedy's statement on Cuba, 4 September 1962, Editorial Note, Doc. 411, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>186</sup> Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, p. 301.

<sup>187</sup> May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy*, p. 62.

<sup>188</sup> James A. Nathan, 'The Heyday of the New Strategy: the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Confirmation of Coercive diplomacy,' in Nathan, *The Cuban Missile*, p. 13.

<sup>189</sup> Robert McNamara, *Blundering into Disaster* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), p. 9.

<sup>190</sup> National Security Archives, 'Audio clips,' 27 October 1962.

Second, the Administration had time, at the start of October, for some extra military exercises, one envisaged an amphibious landing in the Island of Vieques to oust a dictator called Ortsac (Castro in reverse). Furthermore, the US also started to pre-position its Navy for a blockade of Cuba to be carried out in mid-October. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, forces were taken to the highest state of readiness and Commander in Chief Atlantic Command (CINCLANT) Admiral Dennison told McNamara that these preparations could have been masked telling the media that *Phibriglex-62* (an exercise scheduled for mid-October) was being anticipated.<sup>191</sup> These moves convinced some scholars that the US was ready to invade Cuba, regardless of the discovery of the missiles.<sup>192</sup> More recent evidence has suggested that even in this case, the President was unwilling to start a war.<sup>193</sup> Still, these moves further convinced the Soviet Union of the imminence of the invasion, leading Soviet officials to step up the deliveries and the work on the missile bases. On the US part, the plans devised at this stage - blockade, air strike and invasion - provided the only alternatives seriously considered at the start of the crisis, put the military on a war footing, and constrained the President's freedom of action.

Finally, at the end of August, U-2 flights had spotted the deployment of SA-2 missiles in Cuba. This report increased the tension within the Administration with some, like McCone, pointing out that the SA-2 missiles were put there to protect something; that is nuclear missiles. Others had discounted the possibility. Still the presence of the SA-2 increased the scepticism towards U-2 overflights in Cuba. The scepticism had become dread after two U-2 incidents. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August, a U-2 had violated

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<sup>191</sup> Robert Dennison, *Cinclant Historical account of the Cuban Crisis*, 1963, CMCC, DNSA, p. 39.

<sup>192</sup> Hershberg, 'Before'. More recently Hershberg admitted that he might have been mistaken. *CWHIP Bulletin*, Vol. 17/18.

<sup>193</sup> James G. Hershberg, 'More New Evidence on the Cuban Missile Crisis: More documents from Russian Archives,' *CWHIP Bulletin*, Issue 8/9 Part. 5, Winter 1996, [[http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHPBulletin8-9\\_p5.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHPBulletin8-9_p5.pdf)] (accessed 22 September 2013).

Soviet air space for 9 minutes, leading to Soviet protests. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of September a U-2 manned by Chinese Nationalists had been downed over Mainland China. This incident had been a major 'source of embarrassment' for the Administration.<sup>194</sup> The overflights posed strategic risks and political risks. Had another U-2 been downed over Cuba, this would have led to a major international uproar, it could have led to tension with the USSR on the eve of an election year, it could have constrained US overflights in Cuba and elsewhere, and it could have increased the domestic uproar to invade Cuba. Khrushchev had also complained in a private exchange with the President about the overflights and the 'buzzing of the ships sailing in international waters.'<sup>195</sup> Rusk and Bundy were 'hypervigilant about protecting the President' especially since several military and intelligence officials had voiced their intention to force Kennedy to take action.<sup>196</sup>

Still, stopping the overflights entailed the risk of delaying the discovery of potential missiles. Many pointed out that the restrictions made no sense since the US was accused of all sorts of overflights anyway.<sup>197</sup> However, in line with one of the hypotheses of the project, between short-term 'tangibles' and longer-terms risks, the Administration chose once again the former. Overcoming the opposition of the CIA, with full knowledge of the White House, Bundy and Rusk decided to limit the flights, to change the type of flight, and to modify the route, staying away from the SA-2. The CIA, on its part, became more cautious in making requests. As Barrett and Holland have convincingly argued, this, coupled with the bad seasonal weather in Cuba, created the 'photo gap.'<sup>198</sup> When convincing reports of missiles in Cuba accumulated, a flight was again delayed for reasons of

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<sup>194</sup> ABC Issues and Answers, 'Interview with Paul Nitze,' 9 September 1962, CMCC, DNSA.

<sup>195</sup> 'Message From Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy,' Moscow, September 28, 1962, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Doc. 56. See also Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 70.

<sup>196</sup> Barrett and Holland, *Blind*, p. 8.

<sup>197</sup> Memorandum Prepared by Acting Director of Central Intelligence Carter Washington, August 30, 1962, Doc. 397, *FRUS*, Vol. X.

<sup>198</sup> Barrett and Holland, *Blind*, p. 9.

'plausible deniability.' A pilot from the Pentagon was trained to fly the CIA's U-2 plane to make a potential cover story more credible.<sup>199</sup> The flight was finally conducted on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, more than a month after the discovery of the SA-2. On the 16<sup>th</sup> the President was notified of the presence of the missiles, starting the Missile Crisis, or at least the American part of it.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

*Mr. Khrushchev said we will bury you  
I don't subscribe to this point of view  
It would be such an ignorant thing to do  
If the Russians love their children too.<sup>200</sup>  
Sting, The Russians.*

In 1971, John Kenneth Galbraith, US Ambassador to India during the Kennedy Administration, wrote an article in *Foreign Policy* describing the 1960s as a bad decade. Discussing the Kennedy Presidency and the missile crisis he wrote:

In the Cuban missile crisis President Kennedy had to balance the danger of blowing up the planet against the risk of political attack at home for appeasing the Communists. This was not an irresponsible choice: to ignore the domestic opposition was to risk losing initiative or office to men who wanted an even more dangerous policy...We were in luck, but success in a lottery is no argument for lotteries.<sup>201</sup>

This chapter has tried to show, how the whole Kennedy policy against Cuba - and not only the thirteen days of the missiles crisis - was characterised by blunders, by contradictions and, above all, by an inability to reconcile the political risks that Cuba posed to the Administration, and the strategic risks for the US, and for the Cold War confrontation.

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<sup>199</sup> Barrett and Holland, *Blind*, p. 21.

<sup>200</sup> Sting, 'The Russians,' *The Dream of the Blue Turtles*, 1985  
[<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/sting/russians.html>] (accessed 11 August 2013).

<sup>201</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, 'The Plain Lessons of a bad decade,' *Foreign Policy*, 1 January 1971  
[[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/02/the\\_plain\\_lessons\\_of\\_a\\_bad\\_decade](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/02/the_plain_lessons_of_a_bad_decade)] (accessed 10 October 2013).

In line with the first hypothesis of the project, this chapter has shown the prevailing uncertainty as to Soviet intentions in the late 1950s. Furthermore, the chapter has also identified other dimensions of uncertainty. These included: the President's uncertainty as to possibility of Soviet adventurism in the Western hemisphere, a high number of 'unknown unknowns' in the emergence of the crisis, and the uncertainty as to the locus and type of Soviet reactions to American decisions. Berlin, as we have seen, was one of Kennedy's main concerns. Strengthening the validity of the first hypothesis, the chapter has also identified the tendency of decision-makers to reason, and to present their arguments in terms of what could go wrong – that is of risk - often relying on explicit or implicit odds.

The discussion of the various decisions on Cuba has confirmed the second hypothesis: the minimalism of risk management, the presence of risk-trade-offs and the predominance of short-term (often political) risks. The President recognised the unacceptable risks involved in solving once and for all the problem of Cuba. Still the obsession with the island remained. The pressure to 'do something' led to a balancing act between the domestic political risks posed by Castro, and the strategic risks inherent in an escalation of the Cold War confrontation. The end result was a series of middle way measures. The chapter has discussed these measures as the result of difficult Presidential trade-offs. The chapter has shown President Kennedy often bowing to domestic criticism, taking measures domestically appealing and allegedly 'risk-free' in the short-term, but dangerous both politically and strategically in the longer one.

Kennedy had, in a sense, cornered himself with his campaign statements on Cuba. Once he entered the White House, he had to confront the weight of his campaign promises. Political risks meant that he could not have 'chickened out' from the Bay of Pigs, a plan approved by one of the most successful Generals and Presidents in history. Still, strategic risks imposed limits on American activism, making a full-scale invasion too risky. Imposing a series of limits on the invasion and living the illusion of a 'risk-free' operation, he

obtained the worst of both worlds. The US was correctly identified as the main actor behind the invasion, leading to world embarrassment. But the US had also failed in its endeavour, leaving the Administration humiliated, the Cuban exiles disillusioned, and the Soviets emboldened by a weak President. Kennedy's performance at the Vienna summit confirmed the feeling. Whereas some lessons of the failure were learnt, the most important was not. The Administration proved unable to reconcile political risks and strategic risks.

If Operation Mongoose and all the other policies of the Kennedy Administration aimed genuinely at overthrowing Castro or creating the context for an invasion, they clearly failed. If they were simply a 'safety valve' to ease public and domestic pressure, they also failed. They failed domestically, since Cuba remained, from the end of 1961 onwards, the Administration's Achilles' heel, with the majority of American disapproving of Kennedy's policies.<sup>202</sup> But more crucially, the policies failed at the international level. Sabotage, assassination attempts, military plans, military exercises and Kennedy's bravado in various statements and interviews, convinced the Cubans and the Soviets that the US was ready for a confrontation and, more specifically, ready for invasion. Finally, as the Soviet build-up mounted, there was time for more short-term measures. The Administration postured strong with domestic critics. Many officials guaranteed that there were no offensive weapons in Cuba and that the US would take aggressive action if some were discovered, limiting American choices at the start of the crisis. In September and October, the Administration conducted military exercises that - or so it seems - were never meant to be turned into real action, but increased the pace of the confrontation. Finally, imprisoned by domestic pressure and by the risks of international embarrassment the Administration decided to reduce the overflight of Cuba, delaying the discovery of the missiles for at least one month.

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<sup>202</sup> Freedman, *Kennedy's*, p. 161.

In line with the third hypothesis identified in **Chapter 3**, then, the Cuban Missile crisis and the Administration's predicament at the start of it do not emerge as a direct consequence of the discovery of the missiles. The crisis did not explode; it evolved through eighteen long months in which short-term measures and countervailing risks accumulated. To summarise, contrary to the expectations of the sociological risk literature, the analysis of a case study at the peak of the Soviet-American confrontation presents the Cold War as an era of deep uncertainty, characterised by 'unknown unknowns' and by decision-makers' inability to set long-term strategies and to control the consequences of their own actions.

Concluding his discussion of the Bay of Pigs failure, Schlesinger wrote that the lessons learnt in Cuba in 1961, helped the Administration in solving the crisis in 1962.<sup>203</sup> Reviewing the evidence and the decisions taken between the two events identified by Schlesinger, however, it is safe to conclude that the Kennedy Administration failed in learning the most important lesson: the impossibility of reconciling domestic risks and strategic risks. In line with this project's understanding of how the management of risks contributes to the emergence of crisis, regardless of whether Kennedy did a good job in crisis management in October 1962, he had done a dreadful job in 'crisis avoidance' in the previous two years. **Chapter 6** will move forward fifteen years to look at a different Cold War setting and at different sources of uncertainty and risks. The chapter will start with an historical background of the late 1970s and will later move to an analysis of the trade-offs confronted by the Carter Administration when dealing with Iran.

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<sup>203</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand*, p. 270.

## CHAPTER 6: 'WE ARE STICKING WITH THE SHAH:' THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION AND IRAN, 1977-1979

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Shah was surrounded by puffery and could not bear to be blamed, Carter was self-effacing and quite ready to admit his mistakes...While the Shah looked formidable but was, at his core, insecure and indecisive, Jimmy Carter came off as soft but was...a "tough son of a bitch."

In the words of David Harris, Carter and the Shah 'couldn't have been much less alike' and yet, they ended up 'wrapped around each other tumbling through political free-fall.'<sup>1</sup> In any account of the Carter Administration, the 'debilitating agony'<sup>2</sup> of the Iran hostage crisis tends to play a prominent role. The crisis features heavily in studies of the Carter Administration,<sup>3</sup> in the numerous memoirs of its former members,<sup>4</sup> and obviously in those of former US personnel in Iran.<sup>5</sup> It also represents the culmination of several historical studies of the relations between the US and Iran.<sup>6</sup> More recently, several authors have looked back at the hostage crisis as the first battle between the

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<sup>1</sup> David Harris, *The Crisis: the President, the Prophet and the Shah – 1979 and the coming of militant Islam* (New York: Little Brown, 2004), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: a re-evaluation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House* (London: Cornell University Press, 2009), and Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith* (London: Bantam Books, 1982), Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2010), and Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: the last year of the Carter presidency* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> William Sullivan, *Mission to Iran* (New York: Norton and Co., 1981), John D. Stempel, *Inside the Iranian Revolution* (Lexington: Clark Publishing, 2009), and Robert E. Huyser (Gen.), *Mission to Tehran* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), and Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), and Gary Sick, *All Fall Down* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).



US and radical Islam.<sup>7</sup> In the winter of 2012, the crisis also became 'mainstream' with Ben Affleck's movie *Argo*, telling the story of the CIA mission to rescue the few US Embassy officials that had managed to escape with help from the Canadian Embassy.<sup>8</sup>

The main purpose of this chapter is not to explore the consequences of the 'battle' in Iran, but to understand how it came into existence. In line with the theoretical framework adopted in the project, the present analysis will try to understand how Iran travelled the whole continuum from being an absolute 'non-issue' in the eyes of the incoming Carter Administration, to a major foreign policy concern and, eventually, to the centre of an unprecedented crisis. Before plunging deep into the analysis of the decisions that signposted this evolution, however, **Part two** of the chapter will provide a historical background. The chapter will briefly present the situation of uncertainty characterising the US' position in the mid-1970s. The chapter will then move to a discussion of why Iran did not figure as a prominent issue in the initial plans of the Administration through a look at the Nixon-Kissinger-Ford era. The analysis will suggest that the Carter Administration found itself, at the same time, completely tied to the government of Iran and completely ignorant of what was going on inside the country. Uncertainty, for the Carter Administration meant not only a lack of information, but a lack of knowledge on how to obtain that information; a problem not only of lacking the right answers, but of not having the chance to ask the right questions.<sup>9</sup> Having established this background, **Part three** will proceed with a discussion of the main decisions taken by the Carter Administration on Iran. The core of the chapter will consist of the series of trade-offs faced by President Carter

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<sup>7</sup> David Faber, *Taken Hostage: America's first encounter with radical Islam*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: the first battle in America's war with radical Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2006), and Harris: *The Crisis*.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Affleck, *Argo*, 2012

[[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1024648/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1024648/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)] (accessed 12 August 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Paul Pillar, 'I served in the CIA for 28 years and I can tell you: America's Screw-ups come from bad leaders, not from lousy spies,' *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 191 (Jan/Feb 2012), pp. 51-55.

when dealing with Iran. The chapter will look at the Presidential campaign, at the decisions on arms transfers, at Carter's commitment to human rights, at the policy towards the Iranian opposition and the Shah in the first months of the Revolution, at the choices made once the revolution went under way, and in its immediate aftermath, and finally, at the decision to admit the Shah in New York. As in the previous chapter, the final escalation and the final loss of control – in this case, the hostage taking – will represent not so much the outcome of a faithful decision, but the end of a slow process of mismanagement of risks, and of accumulation of 'countervailing' risks.

## **6.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: NIXON, KISSINGER, AND FORD, KNOWING THE SHAH, 'UNKNOWNING IRAN'**

### **6.2.1 American uncertainty: Team B, the new Cold War, and the loss of certainties**

On the day of Jimmy Carter inauguration, the CIA achieved an unprecedented technological breakthrough. The satellite KH-11 started to send real time images directly, in digital to CIA's computers. On paper, this meant that the President could track Soviet capabilities and developments around the world as they happened.<sup>10</sup> As for the Kennedy Administration, however, the Cold War of the 1970s went far beyond a bean counting exercise. First, even on this 'exercise' there was plenty of disagreement and right-wing groups were pushing for a stronger stand against the USSR. In May 1976, President Gerald Ford had famously given the chance to these groups to make their case through the CIA Team B exercise. A Team B of experts presented a report of both Soviet capabilities and intentions bashing the allegedly biased assumptions of CIA officials (Team A). Although in hindsight, Team B's forecasts would prove massively inflated – if not false – in the mid-1970s, they helped spreading doubts about détente and about Soviet intentions in

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<sup>10</sup> Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes only* (London: Harper and Collins, 1996), pp. 426-427.

Washington's corridors.<sup>11</sup> Second, the Cold War confrontation had expanded to every area of the globe and its nature had changed. It was no longer only a matter of arms races, nor of risk of imposition of a 'pax sovietica.' In US officials' eyes, the problem was that the increasingly disruptive nature of Soviet efforts made the maintenance of order, and the management of the various developments almost impossible.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, America's tendency to see a hidden Soviet hand behind every world development only increased uncertainty and concern. Similarly, the tendency to view the Cold War as a pure zero sum game meant that every US loss, and every minimal Soviet victory was interpreted as a dangerous trend. Furthermore, additional global issues were starting to emerge, such as energy crisis, high technology exports, illegal drug trafficking, and terrorism.<sup>13</sup> The Cold War was 'out of focus: there was no consensus on what it was about, or how important it was in US priorities, or how to gauge who was winning it.' As Nancy Mitchell put it, the Carter Administration would drown in these uncertainties.<sup>14</sup> Third, through the late 1960s and early 1970s, the US had also lost most of its domestic Cold War certainties. As John Ranelagh succinctly put it:

With Vietnam came a demystification of public authority and with Watergate came a multiplication and intensification of the change in public attitudes towards politics and the politicians.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War* (London: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 287. See also James Mann, *The Rise of the Vulcans* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 73-75; and Anne HESSING CAHN, 'Team B: the trillion-dollar experiment,' *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (April 1993), pp. 22, 24-27 [<http://www.proudprimate.com/Placards/team-b-cahn.htm>] (accessed 14 August 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Memo, Brzezinski to President, 'NSC Weekly Report #57,' 5 May 1978, Collection 33, Brzezinski Donated, Box 41, Folder 7, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta (JCL).

<sup>13</sup> John Ranelagh, *The Agency: the rise and decline of the CIA* (London: Sceptre, 1988), p. 641. On the spread of the Cold War in the 1970s see also Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Mitchell, 'The Cold War and Jimmy Carter,' in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Eds.), *Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> Ranelagh, *The Agency*, p. 629.

With the public growing skeptical of Presidential wisdom, Congress had moved to curtail what had been for decades the President's personal turf: foreign policy. Through investigation in Committees, such as the 1975 Church Committee, Congress increasingly questioned the actions of the White House and of the CIA, uncovering, in the meantime, America's darkest secrets.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Congress moved from the benign tendency of 'looking over the President shoulder,' towards a 'codeterminative role,' imposing limits on both CIA's covert operations,<sup>17</sup> and on White House decisions, especially in the field of human rights and arms transfers.<sup>18</sup> Congress pushed the White House to accept the inclusion of a Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs within the State Department.<sup>19</sup> In 1974 the amendment of the Foreign Assistance Act restricted sales of weapons to countries that grossly violated human rights. In 1975, the Harkin Amendment extended similar restrictions in the area of economic aid.<sup>20</sup> The exposure of American misdeeds, the retrenchment of the presidency and of the intelligence community, and the increased complexity of the international agenda had created a state of uncertainty as to America's role in the world. The US government had cut its presence in several countries and it had come to rely more and more on local governments to foster US interests. This was particularly true in Iran.

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas M. Franck and Edward Weisband, *Foreign Policy by Congress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 123-124.

<sup>17</sup> Ranelagh, *The Agency*, chapter 18.

<sup>18</sup> Franck and Weisband, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 83-85.

<sup>19</sup> Kaufman, *Plans*, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> Clair Apodaca, 'Human Rights Policy and Foreign Assistance,' *Ritsumeikan International Affairs*, Vol. 3 (2005), pp. 66-67.

## 6.2.2 Knowing the Shah, unknowing Iranian

### 6.2.2.1 Coups, cuts, and political intelligence

After decades of good reputation,<sup>21</sup> the 1953 coup to overthrow Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and re-install the Shah on the Peacock throne compromised the Iranian image of the US.<sup>22</sup> In the early 1960s, the Kennedy Administration had exercised timid pressure for reform on the Shah's regime.<sup>23</sup> The monarch's reply was the so-called 'White Revolution,' a series of Western inspired reforms including land reform and voting rights that enraged traditional sectors of the Iranian population.<sup>24</sup> After an initial wave of uprising, the Shah seemed to have decisively cracked down on those opposing his programs, exiling Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the process. 'The United States started to concern itself less with Iran's domestic politics and more with its strength as an ally.'<sup>25</sup> More properly, since the late 1960s, the strain put by the Vietnam War on US economic and military resources had also affected the US presence in Iran, causing the withdrawal of USAID missions, the reduction of the Peace Corps (eventually phased out completely by Ambassador Richard Helms in the early 1970s), and the reduction of the gendarmerie mission advisers, spread throughout the country. As John Stempel noted, these were the only Americans trying to look outside Tehran.<sup>26</sup> Political officers assigned to the Tehran Embassy decreased from 21 in 1963, to six from 1973 to the Revolution, preventing

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<sup>21</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*.

<sup>22</sup> Scholars disagree on the effects of the coup on America's reputation. According to the historian James Bill, after the coup, American reputation was tarnished but not fatally compromised. Gary Sick and Stephen Kinzer consider the coup a fatal blow to US-Iran relations. Paul Pillar recently concluded that it was an 'attitude shaping' event. See Sick, *All Fall*, p. 8, Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), and Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 97. Paul Pillar, 'The Role of Villain: Iran and US Foreign Policy,' *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 128, No. 3 (Summer 2013), p. 223.

<sup>23</sup> Stempel, *Inside*, p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> See Amin Saikal, *The Rise and fall of the Shah: Iran from autocracy to religious rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), and Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, *Debacle: the American failure in Iran* (New York: A. Knopf, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> Stempel, *Inside*, p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Stempel, *Inside*, p. 74.

any type of in-depth analysis.<sup>27</sup> Two other elements contributed to the lack of analysis.

The first was the lack of interest in Iran among Foreign Service officials. 'Generalists' with knowledge of a wider area had better career prospects than officers with in-depth analysis of one country. Career prospects were also improved by 'going along' with the Ambassador and with the conventional wisdom.<sup>28</sup> The second, crucial element was the biased nature of political intelligence community's<sup>29</sup> activities in Iran. Since the casual discovery, in the 1950s, of the possibility of spying on the Soviet Union's missile bases from within the Iranian territory, the collection of this information had become America's main concern. Bases along the Iranian-Soviet border monitored 'every blast the Soviets ever emitted.'<sup>30</sup> The Shah cooperated with the US, but this cooperation came at a high cost. It could be argued that several 'countervailing risks' were dismissed. In the trade-off, the United States diverted most of its intelligence resources to the analysis of Soviet moves. As Helms recalled:

When you come down to it...some decisions have to be made about your priorities...Some might say that you should be spending your time reporting fully on Iran, but Iran is not going to damage the national security interests of the United States by a nuclear attack...it is just a question of how much money and time you can spend on such a target with limited resources.<sup>31</sup>

The composition of the intelligence community reflected these concerns: 'There were usually ten CIA case officers in Iran at any given time,' the historian James Bill wrote, 'of these, six or seven would be primarily

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<sup>27</sup> Stempel, *Inside*, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Rubin, *Paved*, p. 183.

<sup>29</sup> Meaning both intelligence and Foreign Service personnel.

<sup>30</sup> William Burr, 'Interview with Armin Meyer,' *Foundation for Iranian Studies Oral History Archive (FISOHA)*, 29 March 1985 [<http://fis-iran.org/en/oralhistory/Meyer-Armin>], *FISOHA* interviews are available through previous registration with the Foundation, pp. 44-45.

<sup>31</sup> William Burr, 'Interview with Richard Helms,' *FISOHA*, 10 June 1985 [<http://fis-iran.org/en/oralhistory/Helms-Richard>], p. 33.

concerned with the Soviet Union or China.<sup>32</sup> Inevitably, the small amount of information collected on the domestic political situation in Iran focused mainly on communist threats to the regime. Some reports identified an 'explosive potential' in Iran and suggested that many groups felt left out of the crash modernisation program, but concluded confirming the Shah's tight grip on the throne.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, due to the importance of the information on the Soviets and since the future of the listening stations depended on the Shah's unpredictable behaviour, both the intelligence community and the Embassy became increasingly concerned with the 'happiness' of the Shah. Officers in Iran limited their activities and contacts. This effort strengthened dynamics already in place. First, instead of adapting to Iran, Embassy and intelligence personnel transplanted mini-American communities in the country, living in an 'English speaking middle class American world,' inside Tehran.<sup>34</sup> Second, as Bill wrote, Americans relied heavily on staff and local contacts from religious minorities, Armenian Catholics in particular - what Bill calls the 'Armenian mafia.'<sup>35</sup> This prevented most Americans from understanding and getting in touch with the predominant Islamic culture. The few contacts made by Embassy officers were simply passed on to the incoming personnel

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<sup>32</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, pp. 401-402.

<sup>33</sup> Memo, American Embassy Tehran (Richard Helms) to the Department of State, 'Iran modernizing monarchy: an assessment,' 8 July 1976, *Documents from the US Espionage Den (DED)*, Vol. 7, [[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v07\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v07_text.pdf)] (accessed 13 August 2013), p. 42. All volumes come from the website archive.org. Page numbers refer to those PDF files, if no page number is mentioned it means that the files do not show one. See also several reports by Richard Helms included in the recent *Wikileaks, Public Library of US Diplomacy – Kissinger Cables collection*. Such as: Richard Helms to Department of State, 'Iran Country Assessment,' 6 April 1973 [[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1973TEHRAN02150\\_b.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1973TEHRAN02150_b.html)] (accessed 12 August 2013).

<sup>34</sup> William Burr, 'Interview with Michael Metrisko,' *FISOHA*, 29 August 1988, [<http://fis-iran.org/en/oralhistory/Metrisko-Michael>], p. 115.

<sup>35</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 390.

reducing the possibility of extending the web of knowledge.<sup>36</sup> The unprecedented level of politicisation of the Embassy had even more dramatic consequences.<sup>37</sup> The suppression of critical cables reached a whole new level during Helms' tenure. Helms later denied the charges,<sup>38</sup> but during his tenure he certainly felt the pressure. As he put it in a cable:

Foreign contact with dissidents or identification with their point of view, is not only discouraged, but if pursued vigorously could probably result in one being PNG'ed.<sup>39</sup>

Understanding the will of the Shah became the main aim of political officers; and this was considered a success. 'Reporting from the mission on most topics,' a memo concluded in the mid-1970s, 'is very satisfactory.' Only a quick reference was made to the fact that such a reporting was increasingly dependent on SAVAK, the Shah's secret service, and on the information it spoon-fed to US officials.<sup>40</sup> Such environment prevented an unbiased in-depth analysis. In Tehran, the 'conventional wisdom' was a dogma never to be questioned. As an Embassy officer confirmed:

At this Embassy, the ambassador is God. The deputy chief of mission is a demy god. The political counsellor who writes up my efficiency report is also possessed of divine attributes. Who am I to question their wisdom about Iran?<sup>41</sup>

The dogma had become even more entrenched due to developments in Washington.

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<sup>36</sup> See several documents in *DED*, Vol. 17, [[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v17\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v17_text.pdf)] (accessed 13 August 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 396.

<sup>38</sup> Burr, 'Interview with Helms,' FISOHA, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> That is, made 'persona non grata.' Memo, Ambassador Helms to Ambassador Claude G. Ross, 'Post memorandum for inspectors,' July 10, 1974, *DED*, Vol. 8, [[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v08\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v08_text.pdf)] (accessed 29 August 2013), pp. 71-75.

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum, David N. Blee to Ambassador Little, 'Part 1: Reporting Assessment, FOCUS: Iran,' 4 Nov. 1976, *DED*, Vol. 8, pp. 137-141

<sup>41</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 395.



### 6.2.2.2 *The Nixon-Kissinger-Ford triumvirate: from 'total commitment' to secrets and lies*

Gary Sick suggested that the main turning point in US-Iran relations was the meeting between Nixon, Kissinger and the Shah on the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of May 1972. In this meeting the total commitment to the Shah took the shape of a *carte blanche* when it came to arms sales.<sup>42</sup> As Sick wrote, it was not the strengthening of the alliance that was wrong. With the US entangled in Vietnam, public opinion opposed to any military intervention, the British withdrawing from East of Suez, and with Persian oil becoming a key factor, there was an 'inescapable logic' in asking Iran to play a new security role.<sup>43</sup> The relationship went sore when it came to arming the Shah for such role. First, in spite of widespread opposition within the Nixon Administration - especially from Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger - the Shah was given complete freedom to purchase any American weapon system he wanted, short of nuclear ones. In a telegram to the Secretary of State Bill Rogers, Kissinger brushed aside every concern and warned against further interference. 'Decisions on the acquisition of military equipment,' the memo read, 'should be left primarily to the government of Iran.'<sup>44</sup> Supporters of the Shah were elated.<sup>45</sup> Others were less enthusiastic. The decision, George Ball would later write, equalled 'giving the keys of the world's largest liquor store to a confirmed alcoholic.'<sup>46</sup>

The situation, in fact, had soon got out of control. Playing on the Shah's greed, US companies convinced the Iranian government to buy weapons Iran did not need, putting unbearable strain on the economy. Furthermore,

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<sup>42</sup> Sick, *All Fall*, p. 15. See also Stephen McGlinchey, 'Richard Nixon's road to Tehran: the making of the US-Iran arms agreement of May 1972,' *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2013), pp. 841-860.

<sup>43</sup> Sick, *All fall*, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Memo, Kissinger to Secretary of State, 'Follow-up on the President's talk with the Shah of Iran,' 15 June 1972, *DED*, Vol. 7, p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> Letter, Jack C. Miklos to D. Beck (Minister-Counselor Embassy Tehran), 26 July, 1972, *DED*, Vol. 8, p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> George Ball, *The Past has another pattern* (London: Norton and Company, 1982), p. 454.

the military could not absorb the high number of weapons, and it was almost impossible to find Iranians who knew how to use them.<sup>47</sup> The Shah started to divert skilled labour from civilian uses to military projects. As the scale of the build-up grew, the Shah hired a high number of foreign experts and workers, increasing the resentment of unemployed Iranians.<sup>48</sup> Contracts with American companies also increased the presence of Americans (often Vietnam veterans), whose questionable behaviour appalled the Iranian population.<sup>49</sup> Military expenditures and contracts also added significantly to the country's inflation and corruption.

Furthermore, and this was the second crucial decision, the 'alcoholic' was given free credit to buy weapons. In May 1970, after a meeting of the CENTO foreign ministers in Washington, Nixon met privately with Iranian Ambassador to the US Ardeshir Zahedi. 'Tell the Shah,' Nixon reportedly told the Ambassador, 'you can push [us] as much as you want [on oil prices].'<sup>50</sup> Increased oil revenues in Iran, Nixon thought, could only mean increasing weapons purchase from the Shah and the strengthening of the link with Iran. The Shah banked on increased oil revenues. The pace of Iranian industrialisation skyrocketed, and with it social problems. A high number of peasants moved to the city hoping to share the fruits of modernisation, creating a massive demographic dislocation. Members of the middle class turned hostile, as they could not find jobs adequate to their skills, and had no access to political circles. The pace of modernisation also exposed weaknesses in the bureaucracy and in social service, and increased the divide between rich and poor.<sup>51</sup> In an effort to strengthen the regime, the Shah co-opted or repressed members of the liberal and leftist-moderate

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew S. Cooper, *The Oil Kings* (Oxford: One World Publications, 2011), p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> Saikal, *The rise*, p. 207.

<sup>49</sup> Saikal, *The rise*, pp. 185-186.

<sup>50</sup> Cooper, *The Oil*, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> Ledeen and Lewis, *Debacle*, pp. 28-29.

opposition, making sure that real opposition would come from those who could appeal to the impoverished and disillusioned masses.<sup>52</sup>

The Shah also indulged in pure demonstrations of megalomania, such as the celebration of the 2500 years of Persian monarchy in 1971. At the international level, the event represented a PR masterpiece. The Shah invited 'everybody who was anybody in the US, in media, politics and everything else', playing with their vanity and making them oblivious to the political situation in Iran.<sup>53</sup> Iranians hated it for its staggering cost, for its Western nature, and for the dismissal of the Islamic heritage.<sup>54</sup> The 1977 international art festival in Shiraz, with shocking and highly offensive performance such as a staged rape, had similar effects.<sup>55</sup> Resentment against the corruption brought by the West increased, as did attacks against Americans. Even more problematically, the oil bonanza did not last. According to Andrew Scott Cooper, during the Ford Administration, the US feeling the strain of high oil prices convinced Saudi Arabia to pump oil in the market. With the price of oil decreasing, the Shah, who had assumed increasing oil revenues in his ambitious budgets, was left with a dreadful economic balance.<sup>56</sup>

What is key here is that due to the abysmal intelligence reporting from Iran, to the vested interests of many of Washington's heavyweights, and to the secrecy of many of the Nixon-Kissinger era deals, the incoming Carter Administration was completely unaware of developments inside Iran. The transition papers also presented a very biased picture of the Shah as a ruler loved by his people and supported by key sectors of society, with opposition

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<sup>52</sup> Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 145.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Bourne, Interview with the author, 15 September 2012, Oxford.

<sup>54</sup> William Shawcross, *The Shah's last ride* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> Anthony Parsons, *The Pride and the Fall* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p. 54.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew S. Cooper, 'Showdown at Doha: the secret oil deal that helped sink the Shah of Iran,' *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Autumn 2008), pp. 567-591.

coming only from small terrorist groups. The report omitted the problems of Iran's economy and the country's difficulty in absorbing US weapons. On the contrary, the incoming administration was advised not to reduce these sales.

A significant change in this policy of forthcomingness would...entail a definite risk that the Shah would counter with actions against our military and intelligence assets in Iran and very probably on our economic and commercial interests.<sup>57</sup>

The Carter Administration started to operate in an 'information vacuum.'<sup>58</sup>

### **6.3 IRANIAN REVOLUTION AND AMERICAN RISK MANAGEMENT: FROM EARLY COMMITMENTS TO THE FINAL TRAGEDY**

During the 1976 Presidential campaign, Iran was barely mentioned. In the second Presidential debate on foreign policy, candidate Carter condemned the Ford Administration for turning the United States into the 'arms merchant of the world.' 'As a matter of fact,' Carter added, 'Iran is going to get 80 F-14s before we even met our own Air Force orders...This is a ridiculous situation and it ought to be changed.'<sup>59</sup> Since then, Iran had disappeared. In the fall of 1976, future Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, provided Carter with an overview of the Administration's prospective foreign policy goals. Iran was nowhere to be found.<sup>60</sup> Although Iran was not a main concern for the Presidential candidates, the Shah was following with attention the US elections. As early as May 1976, the monarch was making enquiries about Carter who was campaigning on issues that were prominent in the US relations with Iran: weapons sales and human rights. 'Ask the US Ambassador for information about this man Jimmy Carter,' he told Court Minister Asadollah Alam, 'he seems to be making a clean sweep

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<sup>57</sup> Department of State Briefing Papers, Transition, 'Iran,' *DED*, Vol. 8, pp. 121-132.

<sup>58</sup> Cooper, *The Oil*, p. 376.

<sup>59</sup> US Government, *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, Vol. 3 (Washington: US Government printing Office, 1979), p. 100.

<sup>60</sup> Vance, *Hard*, pp. 441-462.

of the Democratic primaries.<sup>61</sup> Alam grudgingly wrote in his diary in July 1976 that Carter would probably end up winning the Presidency. If that was going to be the case, he added, 'who knows what sort of calamity he may unleash on the world. He is no more than an ignorant peasant boy.' 'Carter', he put it, 'may turn out to be an even greater ass than Ford.'<sup>62</sup>

As Carter entered the White House, he surrounded himself with officials from two main groups: 'hard-core' followers who had been loyal to him from the start, and were, like him, outsiders; and officials more used to life in Washington who had also demonstrated a certain degree of loyalty to the new President. The first group - sometimes defined as the 'Georgian Mafia'<sup>63</sup> - included Press Secretary Jody Powell, and Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan. The second included: the tough National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski - one of the first to join Carter's campaign - and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. Other key members of the new Administration included Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, Vice President Walter Mondale, and the new Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Stansfield Turner. As is well known, several rivalries developed within the Administration, above all the famous Vance-Brzezinski split.<sup>64</sup> The point to be made here is that this selection of personnel clearly aimed at establishing a break with the previous Nixon-Kissinger era. In terms of policies towards Iran, however, the break was not so clear.

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<sup>61</sup> Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I* (London: New World, 1991), p. 500.

<sup>62</sup> Alam, *The Shah*, p. 484.

<sup>63</sup> Dumbrell, *The Carter*, p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> For a more exhaustive discussion of Carter's selection of personnel and of the various rivalries see David Rothkopf, *Running the World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005); and Dumbrell, *The Carter*. For great emphasis on the Vance/Brzezinski rivalry see Glad, *An Outsider*, and Kaufman, *Plans*.

### **6.3.1 Risk vs. risk trade-off 1: campaigning promises vs. the Shah's happiness**

#### *6.3.1.1 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 1a: Arms transfers and AWACs vs. political risks, Soviet hands, and regime change*

The Shah accepted Carter's victory with equanimity. After all, he reasoned, 'we're spending so much money on US military and supply that no US government...could afford to deny us.' <sup>65</sup> Immediately after Carter's elections, a Congressional Delegation had visited Iran. The Delegation's report stressed the crucial strategic importance of Iran and of the Strait of Hormuz, for the flow of oil to the Western World. The report had also looked at the human rights and social situation in the country suggesting that there were causes for both 'optimism and dismay.' Only two Senators were highly critical of the situation and warned against measures in support of the Shah: Senator Thomas Eagleton (D-MO) and Senator John Culver (D-IA). <sup>66</sup> A critical assessment of Iran came also from the NSC. In the first days in office, President Carter called for a review of US military posture in Presidential Review Memorandum 10 (PRM-10). National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski asked William Odom, his military assistant, and Samuel Huntington, working in the NSC, to identify the likely areas of confrontation between the US and the USSR. Odom and Huntington concluded that the Persian Gulf was the most critical area and that the Soviet Union might also exploit domestic problems in Iran.<sup>67</sup>

The first meeting between the Shah and the new administration, however, seemed to confirm the King's impression. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance met the Shah in Tehran and emphasised the importance of US military relations with Iran. Carter had decided to go ahead with the pending sale of 160 F-16s. Vance made reference to the need for the Administration to

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<sup>65</sup> Alam, *The Shah*, p. 524

<sup>66</sup> Ira Shapiro, *The Last Great Senate* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012), pp. 75-76.

<sup>67</sup> Christian Emery, *US Foreign Policy and the Iranian Revolution* (New York : Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), pp. 29-30.

reduce arms transfers and to the possibility that the US-Iran relationship might create trouble for the Administration in Congress. The meeting, however, was cordial and the Shah was 'unperturbed' by Vance's hints.<sup>68</sup> Vance went back to Washington charmed by the Shah's expertise.<sup>69</sup> A few days after the Secretary of State's return, Carter published, in line with campaign promises, Presidential Directive 13, a set of measures to reduce conventional arms transfers. The Directive defined arms transfers as an 'exceptional foreign policy implement' to be used only to promote national security interests. The directive established a series of restrictions on arms transfers and, more importantly, raised the profile of the issue. Only the President directly could make and approve exceptions to the restrictions.<sup>70</sup> Such provision strongly elevated the political risks for the President. Being the one to decide on the hardest cases, the President 'would be unable to dissociate himself from an unpopular or controversial decision.'<sup>71</sup> A showdown among multiple political and strategic risks was just around the corner.

In his May meeting, Vance had promised the Shah that the Administration would submit to Congress the proposal for the sale of AWACs (Airbourne Warning and Control Systems) to Iran. In July the proposal was sent to the Hill. Congress, however, was furious. One year earlier, Congress had exposed how Washington had lost control on the sales of weapons to Iran.<sup>72</sup> Carter himself had campaigned against this 'bonanza' but now was submitting a request for a new massive sale. Several Senators sent letters to

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<sup>68</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 318-319.

<sup>69</sup> Telegram, Vance to President Carter, 'Evening Report to the President,' 13 May 1977, NLC-128-12-8-7-1, JCL.

<sup>70</sup> Jimmy Carter, 'Presidential Directive/ NSC – 13: Conventional arms transfers policy,' 13 May 1977, [<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/pddirectives/pd13.pdf>] (accessed 12 August 2013).

<sup>71</sup> Sick, *All Fall*, p. 30.

<sup>72</sup> US Senate, 'US Military sales to Iran,' *Staff Report to the Subcommittee on Foreign Assistance of the Committee on Foreign Relations*, United States Senate, July 1976 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1976), p. viii. Reports (unless otherwise specified) are accessed through the Hathi Trust website [<http://www.hathitrust.org>] (accessed 24 September 2013).

Carter complaining that the sale violated PD-13.<sup>73</sup> The various risks involved in the sale were clearly spelled out in Senate hearings. Interpreting the general mood, Senator Culver argued:

If we are to have a policy that approves sales only in exceptional cases...it makes little sense to me to turn around, before the ink is dry on that piece of paper, and exempt Iran from these guidelines.<sup>74</sup>

More specifically, the sale of AWACs entailed strategic risks and political risks. On the political side, the sale exposed stark inconsistencies between Carter's campaign pledges and his first measures in office. Senator Eagleton stated that the deal was born 'in the atmosphere of secret deals of the previous Administration,' and violated the policy of restraint Carter promoted.<sup>75</sup>

The media had largely maintained a Watergate-era outlook towards the presidency.<sup>76</sup> According to some, the media had also been hostile to Carter from the start, due to the candidate's rough style in dealing with them on the campaign trail.<sup>77</sup> When the first inconsistencies emerged, the media went on the attack. A story, by Watergate hero Bob Woodward, revealed that the AWACs were actually part of the secret dealings of the previous Administration, and, in particular, of the IBEX project, a secret radar system to be provided to Iran. The project had involved massive corruption of Iranian middlemen and the death of three Americans working for Rockwell, the company in charge of the project.<sup>78</sup> CIA director Stansfield Turner's sudden 'change of heart' worsened the Administration's position. He first

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<sup>73</sup> White House Central File, FO-30, FO 3-2/CO 71 1/20/77 - 1/20/81, JCL.

<sup>74</sup> US Senate, 'Sale of AWACS to Iran,' Hearings, July 18, 22, 25, 27 and September 19, 1977 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1977), p. 7.

<sup>75</sup> US Senate, 'Sale of AWACS,' p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> I. M. Destler, Leslie Gelb, and Anthony Lake, *Our own worst Enemy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 154.

<sup>77</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> Bob Woodward, 'IBEX: Deadly symbol of US Arms sales problem,' *The Washington Post*, 2 January 2, 1977.



declared, in a report for the General Accounting Office, that he had reservations about the deal. At the time of the hearings, however, 'convinced' by other members of the Administration, he backed the sale. The *Washington Post* and other 'inconsistency hungry' media,<sup>79</sup> went on the attack suggesting that manoeuvres such as Turner's one revived:

Charges, often heard during the period Henry A. Kissinger presided over the national security intelligence system, that the product of the CIA was being modified to conform with the political decisions of the policymakers.<sup>80</sup>

The Administration that had relied on a clear break with previous practices was politically exposed.

The sale also entailed strategic risks. First, in the short-term, the AWACs, a brand new technology, could end up in Soviet hands. Second, the system, introducing a new weapon in the region, could open possibilities of regional arms races (something that the PD-13 was meant to avoid). The sale also posed direct risks for US security. In the short-term, the sale implied the continuous presence of American personnel in Iran. A deterioration of the situation could create a 'hostage potential.'<sup>81</sup> In the long-term, the instability of the Iranian regime posed risks. Senator Culver warned:

Iran is an autocratic government with rule by one man...the Iranian Government could change and we never know in exactly which direction this armada of military power will be pointed.<sup>82</sup>

Senator and former Presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey (D-MN) charged that the only justification provided for the sale had been a short-term 'political' one: 'turning Iran down will seriously strain our relationship with the Shah.' Senator Eagleton concurred. In his opinion, the pressure

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas L. Hughes, 'Carter and the management of contradictions,' *Foreign Policy*, No. 31 (Summer 1978), pp. 34-55.

<sup>80</sup> Laurence Stern, 'CIA Chief alters Iran radar stand,' *The Washington Post*, 18 July 1977.

<sup>81</sup> US Senate, 'Sale of AWACS,' p. 21.

<sup>82</sup> US Senate, 'Sale of AWACS,' p. 7.

that such a justification exercised had taken precedence 'over careful and sober risk analysis.'<sup>83</sup> As we have seen, the deep uncertainty as to developments in Iran certainly played a role in the Administration's risk analysis. Still, it seems clear that the Administration considered and dismissed countervailing risks. In the hearings, Alfred Atherton, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, acknowledged the trade-off inherent in the sale. 'One has to make judgments and calculate the risks,' he told the Senate, 'in our judgment, the risks of this do not outweigh the advantages.' First, he suggested that even a possible successor regime would continue the current policies. Then, contradictorily, he added that Iran was a very stable regime with succession provided for. 'In our judgment,' he continued, 'one can assume with a fair amount of assurance, though obviously not 100-percent assurance, that this kind of worst-case development is not going to occur.'<sup>84</sup>

Atherton was not alone. No one in the Administration had considered the long-term strategic risks, but even the short-term political risks were soon dismissed. Vance warned Carter that the decision was a 'political decision,' to be made taking into account the future relations with Congress.<sup>85</sup> But the Administration went on. After further debate, and a reduction in a number of AWACs, the sale was accepted. The Administration had identified its 'target risk,' the possibility of a weakened relationship with the Shah due to a reduction of US 'forthcomingness,' and it had rejected or overlooked the 'countervailing' risks. Even before the final decision, Carter had reassured the Shah:

I have approved a new set of policy guidelines on the foreign sale of military equipment...however, I wish to give you my personal assurances that this policy will not disturb the close

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<sup>83</sup> US Senate, 'Sale of AWACS,' p. 37 and p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> US Senate, 'Sale of AWACS,' p. 37 and p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Letter, Hamilton Jordan to Carter, undated, filed 1 Aug. 1977, Box CO-31, WHCF, Subject File, Countries, Folder - CO 71 Executive 1/20/77-8/31/77, JCL.

security relationship which has developed between our two countries.<sup>86</sup>

Later, while the debate on AWACS was raging, Carter made sure to remind the Shah how much he cherished Iran's friendship, adding that he had approved for Iran sales of military equipment, which, in dollar volume, was 'greater by half than that approved for any other nation in the world.'<sup>87</sup> The Shah was flattered. 'I have no cause for complaint,' he would comment to Alam.<sup>88</sup> It could be argued, that such commitment was inconsequential. The delivery of the AWACs was supposed to start in 1981 but was prevented by the Revolution.<sup>89</sup> What is suggested here, however, is that faced with risks on both sides, the Administration sided with the Shah. This attitudes would be responsible for 'wrapping' the destiny of Carter with that of the Shah:

In Iranian eyes, it was the arms sales program more than any other aspect of the alliance between the United States and Iran that compromised the Shah's image with Iranians and led them to believe that the Shah was America's 'man.'<sup>90</sup>

As Gary Sick, a member of Carter's National Security Council staff, recently suggested, Carter 'had no desire to damage the relations with Iran or to see anything go wrong,' and if this involved giving the Shah almost everything he wanted, so be it.<sup>91</sup> The same conclusion can be drawn from the Administration human rights policies towards Iran.

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<sup>86</sup> Telegram, Vance to Am. Emb. Tehran, 'Message for the Shah from President Carter,' 24 May 1977, Plains Files, Box 23, Folder 9.

<sup>87</sup> Letter, Jimmy Carter to the Shah of Iran, 15 July, 1977, Plains Files, Box 23, Folder 9, JCL.

<sup>88</sup> Alam, *The Shah*, p. 545.

<sup>89</sup> Rubin, *Paved*, p. 198

<sup>90</sup> Rubin, *Paved*, p. 260.

<sup>91</sup> Gary Sick, Interview with the author, 16 July 2012, New York.

### 6.3.1.2 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 1b: human rights, 'pounding the table' vs. 'seeing sense'

By the mid-1970s, the Shah had completely abandoned his White Revolution, to fall back on pure repression. In 1975, he abandoned the already farcical two-party system and established a single Party, the Resurgence Party; membership was compulsory.<sup>92</sup> In 1976, however, with violence increasing and with people looking for protection in the mosques, even the Shah realised the failure of his repressive strategy. He went back to stressing the achievements of the White Revolution, he gave the new single Party two 'competing' wings, he substituted members of the elites with technocrats, he invited international organisations, such as the International Commission of Jurists, to Iran to advise on reforms, and relaxed controls on the media and on personal freedoms.<sup>93</sup> To this day it is unclear whether these measures built on international developments, on the increased US attention to human rights, or on the prospects of Carter's election.

As we have seen, 'Congress lit the human rights candle long before it was seized by candidate Carter,'<sup>94</sup> still, the candidate's concern was real. Human rights and equality appealed to Carter as a person, since his childhood in racially divided Plains.<sup>95</sup> In the campaign, as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. argued, 'the new President, in a remarkable display of leadership, seized the standard of human rights and succeeded in presenting it to the world as if it had been American property all along,'<sup>96</sup> regardless of the dark times of the 1970s. The first measures after Carter's election seemed to confirm the trend. Even the hard-line Brzezinski, acknowledged that human rights could play a crucial role in increasing America's 'ideological impact,' infusing 'greater historical optimism.' Human rights could have been the right

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<sup>92</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 196.

<sup>93</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 222.

<sup>94</sup> Franck and Weisband, *Foreign Policy by Congress*, p. 98.

<sup>95</sup> Jimmy Carter, *An Hour before daylight* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 77.

<sup>96</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr. 'Human Rights and the American Tradition,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (1978), p. 513.

message to send out, especially to the Third World<sup>97</sup>. Carter's Inaugural Address confirmed the point. 'Our commitment to human rights,' the new President proclaimed, 'must be absolute.' Through human rights the United States could find new consensus at home, and renewed respect abroad.<sup>98</sup> Once in office, Carter raised the profile of human rights. The Bureau of Humanitarian Intervention and Human Rights was given a new life under Patricia Derian, a combative human rights activist, deputy director of Carter's 1976 Campaign. Furthermore, Warren Christopher, Deputy Secretary of State, became director of an interagency group with the task of including human rights considerations in lending and aid decisions.<sup>99</sup>

When it came to Iran, however, the pattern was not different from the one chosen on arms transfers. In the first May meeting with the Shah, Vance had made reference to human rights. The Shah had not been impressed. 'He had no objections to our human rights policy,' Vance reported, 'as long as it was a question of general principle and not directed at him.'<sup>100</sup> No significant change emerged from the meeting. Still, the election of Carter, 'the champion of human rights,' and Vance's visit had emboldened the Iranian opposition. Some had even interpreted Vance's visit as an *aut-aut* to the Shah: liberalise or go.<sup>101</sup> More generally, opposition groups thought that President Carter would bring visible change to Iran, or that activists would have been able to

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<sup>97</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 3

<sup>98</sup> Jimmy Carter, 'Inaugural Address,' 20 January 1977, [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6575#axzz1kN7PIlg4>] (accessed 12 August 2013).

<sup>99</sup> Dumbrell, *The Carter*, pp. 180-182; and Victor S. Kaufman, 'The Bureau of Human Rights during the Carter Administration,' *The Historian*, Vol. 61, no. 1 (September 1998), pp. 51-66. For a critical view of Carter's human rights record see Joshua Muravchik, *The Uncertain Crusade: Jimmy Carter and the dilemmas of Human Rights Policy* (London: Hamilton Press 1986). For a different interpretation suggesting that Carter did what he could in difficult circumstances see Robert Strong, *Working in the world: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

<sup>100</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 319.

<sup>101</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 228.

operate under the US protective 'umbrella.'<sup>102</sup> New political groups emerged, including the revived *Liberation Movement of Iran* (LMI), headed by Mehdi Bazargan. Activists wrote letters complaining about the regime. Security forces allowed unprecedented gatherings and criticisms of the regime went unpunished.<sup>103</sup> In late October, religious ceremonies to mourn the death of Ayatollah Khomeini's son became political occasions to criticise the regime. They were repressed only when they turned into full-fledged demonstrations.<sup>104</sup> Change, however, was not on the cards. The Shah had welcomed Vance's business-like attitude. As Alam wrote: 'Carter is beginning to see sense. He's no longer preaching the same old nonsense he did during the election.'<sup>105</sup>

Within the Administration, the risks inherent in the human rights policy were clear. In July 1977, Warren Christopher had already identified what could go wrong in the push for human rights. Presidential Review Memorandum 28, the key document on the issue, made clear that in pushing human rights concerns, the Administration should have acknowledged potential conflict with other interests, such as national security, and the need to avoid difficulties with the target government. The choices in this field could expose the Administration to both political and strategic risks:

Our security assistance is a matter of great sensitivity both to the regime who receives it...and to the American public and Congress who watch it closely as an index of priority we place on human rights.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 228.

<sup>103</sup> BBC, Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), 1977, Part 4, 8 February and 23 March (London: BBC Monitoring Service, 1977).

<sup>104</sup> Charles Kurzman, 'The Qum protests and the coming of the Iranian Revolution, 1975 and 1978,' *Social Science History*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2003), p. 304.

<sup>105</sup> Alam, *The Shah*, p. 540.

<sup>106</sup> Warren Christopher, 'Presidential Review Memorandum [PRM] 28: Human rights,' 8 July 1977, [<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/prmemorandums/prm28.pdf>] (accessed 12 August 2013).

In this sense, 'to be perceived as supporting a repressive regime, necessarily and substantially impeaches the credibility of our human rights policy.'<sup>107</sup> The Administration's approach to the Shah, however, continued to be one-sided.

In November, Carter was ready to receive the Shah at the White House. The talking points prepared by Vance identified many problems of the US-Iran relationship: human rights were not in the six most important.<sup>108</sup> More specifically, Vance suggested that the US should have shown appreciation of the recent moves towards liberalisation made by the Shah. Human rights groups had often been 'uncritical' in their charges and some had 'gravely exaggerated the situation.'<sup>109</sup> When the Shah arrived in Washington, supporters of the regime and groups opposing it clashed outside the White House. Police forces used tear gas to separate them. The gas made it through to the White House lawn, where Carter and the Shah wiped their tears as they welcomed each other. When the first meeting occurred, human rights were not discussed. Some of the more activist members of the Administration questioned Carter's commitment. In a hand-written note delivered to Hamilton Jordan, Heidi Hanson from the State Department lamented:

Rumor has it in my office...President Carter and the Shah talked about everything but Human rights...The bureaucrats here have to know...that human rights is still a part of our foreign policy – no matter who we're talking with.<sup>110</sup>

In the meeting the following day, Carter, admittedly, told the Shah that he was aware of opposition to his rule. 'Rights are not always honoured in

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<sup>107</sup> Christopher, 'PRM 28,' pp. 39-40.

<sup>108</sup> Memo, Secretary of State Vance to the President, 'Visit of the Shah and Shahbanou,' 15-16 November 1977, Collection 15, Brzezinski Office File, Box 20, Folder 2, Doc. 6B, JCL.

<sup>109</sup> Memo, Vance to the President, 'Visit of the Shah,' p. 14.

<sup>110</sup> Note, Heidi Hanson to Jody Powell, 22 November 1977, White House Central File, Subject Files, Countries, Box CO-31, Folder – CO 71 Exec. 11/21/77-12/31/78.

Iran,' the President stated, and this was damaging Iran's reputation. The Shah did not budge. Asked if there was anything that he could do, he replied: 'No.' The dissidents were fomented by communists and outside powers, and he needed to protect his country.<sup>111</sup> More generally, the impression was that the pressure had been mild. Asked if the theme had been discussed, Press Secretary Jody Powell replied that the US preferred to avoid specific judgments on countries.<sup>112</sup> Human rights were reviewed as a general concern of the President.<sup>113</sup> Carter 'never really pounded the table.'<sup>114</sup>

As Christopher had warned, this choice entailed domestic political risks and long-term strategic risks. On the domestic front, both Congress and the media started to discuss openly the hypocrisy of the Administration. 'To human rights partisans,' the *Washington Post* accused, 'the reception accorded to the Shah already has been taken as a proof that the Administration is following a double standard.'<sup>115</sup> Brzezinski had identified the same problem. In Congress, he had warned:

The feeling is growing that much is being done and said about communist countries, over whom we have limited leverage while almost nothing is being done in regard to countries which depend upon us.<sup>116</sup>

Political pressures and inconsistencies were not the only risks dismissed. With its benevolent approach to the Shah, the Administration had created a

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<sup>111</sup> Carter, *Keeping*, pp. 436-437.

<sup>112</sup> Susanna McBee, 'Iran Shifts stand, will try to keep oil prices down,' *The Washington Post*, 17 November 1977.

<sup>113</sup> 'Shahanshah of Iran visits Washington,' *Department of State Bulletin*, 15 November 1977, p. 912, [<http://www.archive.org/details/departmentofstatb7777unit>] (accessed 12 August 2013).

<sup>114</sup> William Burr, 'Interview with Charles Naas,' FISOHA, 31 May 1988, p. 127.

<sup>115</sup> John M. Goshko, 'Human rights policy test,' *The Washington Post*, 16 November 1977.

<sup>116</sup> Memo Brzezinski to President, 'Weekly National Security Report #2,' 26 February 1977, Collection 33, Brzezinski Donated, JCL, Box. 41, Folder 3, JCL.



deadly mixture of disillusionment and hatred in the Iranian opposition and population. After the November meeting, the Shah returned to Tehran and cracked down harshly on the opposition. Riot police and men in civilian clothes working for SAVAK arrested 220 students and beat hundreds. Apparently, the repression occurred for no other reason than the Shah's anger at the demonstrations in Washington.<sup>117</sup> The opposition that had hoped to be protected by Carter's human rights' umbrella, realised that it had been left naked in the confrontation with the Shah's power. As moderate Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri would later state:

We didn't expect Carter to defend the Shah...for he is a religious man who has raised the slogan of defending human rights. How can Carter, the devout Christian, defend the Shah?<sup>118</sup>

Similarly, Bazargan, leader of the LMI and future Prime Minister in the Revolutionary government, was shocked. 'Following the Shah's visit to Washington,' he stated, 'repression again seemed the order of the day.'<sup>119</sup> Few failed to notice the connection between Carter's support and the Shah's repression.

In the eyes of the opposition, Carter's December visit to Iran was even more consequential. The opposition still hoped that the US President could rein in the Shah's repressive policies. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of December, Iranian opposition leaders had sent a letter to the UN Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, with a copy to Carter, requesting help in promoting human rights. The appeal to the UN was publicised in Tehran just before Carter's arrival, but the President ignored it.<sup>120</sup> Most of the 29 opposition leaders who had signed the letter were arrested.<sup>121</sup> Carter's New Year's Eve toast for the Shah famously confirmed the total commitment to the monarch, and the

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<sup>117</sup> Jonathan C. Randal, 'Shah moves to defuse Iranian dissent,' *The Washington Post*, 4 March 1978.

<sup>118</sup> Rubin, *Paved*, p. 197.

<sup>119</sup> Kurzman, 'The Qum,' p. 304.

<sup>120</sup> Stempel, *Inside*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>121</sup> Richard Cottam, 'Goodbye to America's Shah,' *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 34 (Spring 1979), p. 13.

disregard for human rights. Carter described the issues discussed by the two leaders, and defined human rights as a cause 'shared deeply by our people and by the leaders of our two nations.' He famously concluded describing Iran as an 'island of stability' due to the enlightened leadership of the Shah; a leader loved by his people and the best host to spend the festivities with.<sup>122</sup> Some have attributed the flamboyant nature of the toast to Carter's Southern penchant for exaggeration.<sup>123</sup> In Tehran, however, the consequences were massive. As with the November visit, the Shah was emboldened. The toast and Carter's presence boasted his confidence.<sup>124</sup> He could do away with liberalisation and have a free hand in repressing of opposition.<sup>125</sup> Any hope of the opposition was dashed. Ayatollah Khomeini thundered from exile that Carter used the 'logic of bandits'. He pretended to treat human rights as inalienable, but then refused to listen. Carter, according to Khomeini, could not stress human rights concerns in a country where the US had military bases.<sup>126</sup>

### **6.3.2 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 2: the Shah and the military bases vs. knowing Iran**

As we have seen, the Carter Administration entered office with very little knowledge of Iran; uncertainty predominated. On arms transfer, the short-term goal of the Shah's happiness had made the Administration dismiss short-term and long-term risks identified in Congress. With the same attitude, the Administration had watered down its human rights commitment to please the Shah and maintain the 'special relationship.' In doing this, it had first raised expectations and then dashed the hopes of the

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<sup>122</sup> Jimmy Carter, 'Tehran, Iran Toasts of the President and the Shah at a State Dinner,' 31 December 1977, [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7080>] (accessed 13 August 2013).

<sup>123</sup> Steven Hochman, Interview with the Author, 3 August 2011, Carter Center, Atlanta. See also Harris, *The Crisis*, pp. 73-75.

<sup>124</sup> Sullivan, *Mission*, p. 130.

<sup>125</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 236

<sup>126</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 234.

opposition. As Vance would argue in his memoirs, the Administration had 'decided early on' that it was US interest to support the Shah.<sup>127</sup> Unquestioned support became the default position of the Administration and it shaped the way in which the Administration and the intelligence community initially looked to Iran. To be sure, by the time the Administration took office biases and problems in US political intelligence were so entrenched that they would have proved extremely resistant to change.

Looking at the intelligence performance, it is interesting to note how the Carter Administration had demonstrated a clear understanding of potential causes of intelligence failure. In a memo to the President, Henry Owen, US diplomat and Brookings' Director of Foreign Policy Studies, wrote that the key in avoiding failures was to look at more than one source of intelligence.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, in 1977 South Africa had gone extremely close to the development of nuclear capabilities. The US intelligence community had been blind-sided. In a post-mortem report, Brzezinski wrote to Carter that US intelligence had dismissed reports from other countries, that it had a too narrow focus, and that it did not take seriously threats 'outside the USSR and China.'<sup>129</sup> The same problems had characterised and would continue to characterise the US approach to Iran.

As to the 'communist threat,' it is certainly true, as President Carter has recently suggested, that people looking back, today, at the Iranian crisis tend to forget that it took place in a Cold War setting, defined by Cold War

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<sup>127</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 317.

<sup>128</sup> Memo, Henry Owen to President, 'Intelligence Estimating,' 15 June 1977, Folder – Intelligence 1/77-5/79, Collection 7, NSA, Brzezinski Material, Subject File, Box 29, Human Rights 12/78-3/79 through Intel. Oversight Board: 1/78-12/80, JCL.

<sup>129</sup> Memo, Brzezinski to President, 'National Security Council Weekly Report - 24,' 19 August 1977, Collection 33 Brzezinski Donated, Subject File, Box 41, [Trips]-Four Power Meetings (9/77-1/80) through Weekly Reports to the President 61-71 (6/78-9/78), Folder 3 – Weekly Reports 1-15 (2/77-6/77), Doc. 9, JCL.

priorities.<sup>130</sup> Equally, the narrow focus on the Cold War had been a traditional feature of US intelligence in Iran. But it is also clear that the new Administration's approach influenced the collection of intelligence. Stansfield Turner's famous preference for signal intelligences (SIGINT) as opposed to human intelligence (HUMINT), and his firing of several intelligence officers in their 50s reduced the level of expertise across the board.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, during the Carter Administration, détente and the possible signing of a new SALT (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks) treaty made the Iranian listening stations crucial.

In his first meeting with William Sullivan, future Ambassador to Iran, Carter acknowledged that the record of SAVAK was certainly not inspiring, but the information received from the listening stations in Iran was so important as to trump any other consideration.<sup>132</sup> The scant intelligence collected on the internal political developments would equally follow patterns established throughout the Seventies. Attention would continue to be focused mainly on Soviet inspired threats, or on a hidden Soviet hand behind any Iranian event. If this proved impossible, the intelligence would still warn that the main dangers could come from leftist groups. A farcical example may suffice. After having overlooked the power of the religious leadership and after having been swept aside by the revolution, in March 1979, the CIA was still focusing on Soviet involvement and warning that leftist groups were challenging the government of Bazargan, Prime Minister appointed by Khomeini.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> President Jimmy Carter, Interview with the author, 30 July 2011, Plains (GA).

<sup>131</sup> Ranelagh, *The Agency*, pp. 637-644.

<sup>132</sup> Sullivan, *Mission*, p. 21.

<sup>133</sup> CIA, 'Soviet Involvement in the Iranian Crisis,' March 1979, NLC-25-42-10-8-9 and CIA, "Iran: the Leftist challenge to the Bazargan Government", March 1979, NLC-25-42-10-9-8.

Some have defined this problem as a general 'Cold War myopia' impeding US understanding of developments, especially in Third World countries.<sup>134</sup> When it came to Iran, however, these policies were strengthened by precise choices in Washington. There was an explicit recognition of the risks involved in these policies but the effort to manage the 'target risk,' the probability of affecting the Shah's friendship, trumped all 'countervailing risks.' In particular, building on the policies of the Nixon era, and duplicating the choices made on arms transfers and human rights, the Administration adopted a 'do not disturb' attitude when dealing with the Shah. The focus of the political intelligence community remained on the monarch. 'To a considerable degree,' Michael Hornblow, from NSC, wrote:

The state of US relations with Iran is dependent on the personal relationship, which the Ambassador is able to establish with the shah, and this will be Ambassador Sullivan's principal objective.<sup>135</sup>

If this was Sullivan's objective, he certainly achieved it. In spite of the suggestion that he made an effort to go beyond the 'ring around the Embassy,'<sup>136</sup> what Sullivan did was arguably too little and certainly too late. As Harold Saunders from the State Department later admitted, the US ability to 'maintain contacts with all elements of the society' had been limited and the US did that largely out of 'sensitivity to our relationship with the Iranian government.'<sup>137</sup> Even more consequential was the fact that the Embassy was largely the only source on which Washington relied. Sullivan's accounts of his meetings with the Shah soon became the only window through which the US looked at Iran<sup>138</sup>. Somewhat tautologically,

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<sup>134</sup> Jay Hakes (Director JCL), Interview with the author, 27 July 2011, Carter Center, Atlanta.

<sup>135</sup> Michael Hornblow, Memorandum to Tim Smith, 'Proposed Presidential meeting with Ambassador Sullivan,' 19 May 1977, White House Central File (WHCF), Box CO-31, CO 71 Exec 1/20/77-8/31/77, JCL

<sup>136</sup> Sullivan, *Mission*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>137</sup> US House of Representative, 'US Policy toward Iran, January 1979,' Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, 96<sup>th</sup> Congress (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 32.

<sup>138</sup> Sick, *All Falls*, p. 37

the Administration chose to rely exclusively on an Embassy of which it had previously set the agenda. This narrow window excluded other sources. First, the press was largely ignored, as Barry Rubin pointed out:

A full year before the revolution began, the best American newspapers were telling the story of a country with a harsh dictatorial government, severe economic difficulties and an unhealthy emphasis on importing weapons.<sup>139</sup>

Second, the Administration dismissed information from other US posts in Iran. From the spring of 1977, Michael Metrisko recalled, the consulates in Iran witnessed unprecedented rates of work, due to capital flight. Businessmen had lost faith in the regime and were sending their capital abroad. Later the work increased even more, since many of the Iranian former contacts of the American Embassy were requesting visas to flee the country. Political officers from the Embassy would, then, contact the staff at the consulates to activate the visa procedures, but they never bothered asking why their contacts needed a visa in the first place.<sup>140</sup> Third, the Administration missed a sweeping religious revival. Between 1956 and 1976, the urban population had trebled, but many of the new migrants were left largely outside of the economic boom and found comfort in the Mosques. Data on such trends were available in 1976.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, the two main best-selling books at the time were the Koran and the 'Keys to the Garden of Heaven' a book representing a 'fossilized traditional Shi'ism,' in the words of moderate religious authorities.<sup>142</sup> And yet no one paid attention. To be sure, this last point might appear as the result of hindsight bias. As Gary Sick recently put it, there was no historical precedent for a religiously inspired revolution.<sup>143</sup> And yet, these policies were strengthened by developments in Washington and some, including Sick, had identified the

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<sup>139</sup> Rubin, *Paved*, p. 348.

<sup>140</sup> Burr, 'Interview with Metrisko,' FISOHA, pp. 57-58.

<sup>141</sup> Said A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 91.

<sup>142</sup> Arjomand, *The Turban*, p. 92.

<sup>143</sup> Gary Sick, Email exchange with the author, 20 June 2013.

risks involved in a narrow focus on leftist groups and on the happiness of the Shah.

### **6.3.3 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 3: early warning vs. 'Presidential cheerleading'**

In January 1979, a House of Representative report divided the blame for US failure in equal parts between US intelligence in Iran and US policymakers in Washington. 'Policymakers confidence in the Shah,' the report read,

Which intelligence did not challenge, in turn, skewed intelligence: as US policy in the Persian Gulf became more dependent on the Shah, risk of offending the Shah by speaking with the opposition became less acceptable.<sup>144</sup>

In other words, the Administration selection of a target risk – 'offending the Shah' – had, in turn, hindered the intelligence effort. In this context, the second half of 1977 was the time in which the Shah's regime started to unravel. In November, as we have seen, the Shah had come back from Washington and had cracked down on the opposition. The restart of repression only emboldened the opposition. Furthermore, the Shah had started alternating between waves of repression, and moments in which controls were relaxed. This was interpreted as a sign of increasing difficulties.<sup>145</sup> In Washington, some started to sound the alarm. Gary Sick wrote to Brzezinski in November 1977 that the situation was rapidly worsening. The "'foreign conspiracy" theory', Sick wrote, 'is clearly wrong, the Embassy has been struck by the extraordinary organization displayed by the opposition forces.' Experts, he warned, argue that the opposition runs deeper than previously thought. Perhaps, he concluded, 'the Shah is truly

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<sup>144</sup> US House of Representatives, 'Iran: evaluation of US intelligence performance prior to Nov. 1978,' Staff Report, Subcommittee on Evaluation, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (Washington, US Government Printing Office, Washington, 1979), PDF Copy received by Library of Congress, p. 2.

<sup>145</sup> See Stempel, *Inside*.

running scared.’<sup>146</sup> William Odom, military assistant to Brzezinski, recognised that the time had come for ‘hardnosed analysis about the internal situation’ of Iran.<sup>147</sup> These warnings fell on deaf ears.

A few days after Carter’s departure from Tehran, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January, and with the Shah riding the wave of Carter’s backing, Iranian newspapers published an article, most likely forged by the government, defining Khomeini as a foreigner and a tool of British espionage. The reaction was immediate. A massive demonstration took place in Qom on the 8<sup>th</sup>. The police opened fire killing two dozen people.<sup>148</sup> The death of these demonstrators started the 40 days cycle of mourning, typical of the Shi’ite tradition. Approximately 40 days later, in fact, a second massive demonstration erupted in the city of Tabriz. Sick was appalled by the scale of the riots and wrote that they were the work of the ‘true threat to the regime;’ the ‘reactionary Muslim right-wing.’<sup>149</sup> In May, Sick again warned that the Shah was showing signs of weakness, while the religious opposition seemed emboldened by the increasing chaos. Sick suggested two main interpretations. According to the first, religious leaders, defeated in the past by the Shah, were simply another ‘interest group’ that could be defused through accommodation. According to the second, much scarier, theory, religious leaders had ‘uncovered a deep layer of class hostility.’ If this was the case, demonstrations could ‘topple or cripple the present regime.’ ‘The fact,’ Sick concluded, ‘is no one knows,’ but he admitted great concern for long-term prospects.<sup>150</sup> Within the Administration, however, the management of risks followed the established pattern: the target risk

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<sup>146</sup> Memo, Gary Sick to Brzezinski, ‘Human Rights in Iran,’ 30 November 1977, White House Central File, Box CO-31, CO-71 Confidential 1/20/77-1/20/81, JCL.

<sup>147</sup> Miller Center For Public Affairs, ‘Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Madeleine Albright, Leslie Denend and William Odom,’ *Carter Presidency Project (CPP)*, 18 February 1982, JCL.

<sup>148</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 234.

<sup>149</sup> Gary Sick, ‘Chronology - January 1, 1978 – July 7, 1978,’ NLC-25-37-5-1-8.

<sup>150</sup> Memo, Sick to Brzezinski, ‘Stability in Iran,’ 26 May 1978, NLC-6-28-7-38-7.



remained the need to avoid upsetting the Shah; long-term developments were excluded.<sup>151</sup>

In July, human rights concerns were, once again, trumped by the need to help the Shah. The objections of the State Department's Human Right Bureau did not prevent the Administration from selling the Shah crowd-control equipment, including tear gas.<sup>152</sup> On the 5<sup>th</sup>, the Policy Review Committee convened to review the Administration's arms transfer policy to Iran. Leslie Gelb, from the State Department, warned that the Administration needed to balance congressional interests and responsiveness to the Shah. The probability of something going wrong in Iran was clearly the main concern. The Shah seemed in trouble, Brzezinski argued, and the US needed to show total support; the US had to 'capitalize' on this opportunity. In a repetition of the AWACs decision, the trade-off inherent in this short-term capitalisation was dismissed. Brzezinski stated that military support to the Shah strengthened US national interests. The only thing the Administration had to do was to continue with the sale and to educate Congress.<sup>153</sup> Even more important, the US should not consider the possibility and the nature of a post-Shah regime to avoid 'self-fulfilling prophecies.'<sup>154</sup> A CIA study confirmed Brzezinski's position. In spite of a provocative title, 'Iran after the Shah,' the study focused mainly on Iran's traditional social groups and their possible influence. Even more reassuring, the study was famously prefaced by the assessment: Iran 'is not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation.'<sup>155</sup> The Embassy in Iran

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<sup>151</sup> To be sure, the Administration had its hands full with various developments, including the Camp David negotiations.

<sup>152</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 325, and Sick, *All Fall*, p. 42

<sup>153</sup> PRC Meeting, 5 July 1978, White House Situation Room, NLC-28-5-7-4-5.

<sup>154</sup> PRC Meeting, Minutes, 'Arms Transfer Policy for Iran and Security Assistance for Kenya,' 5 July 1978, Collection 33, Brzezinski Donated, Box 25, Folder 4, JCL.

<sup>155</sup> Memo, Brzezinski to President, 3 November 1978, Plains Files, Box 29, Folder 2, JCL.

concurred. Charles Naas, political officer in Tehran, wrote to Vance that the uncertain political mood in the country should not have led to despair.<sup>156</sup>

Demonstrations, however, characterised the summer in Tehran. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of August, the burning of the Rex Cinema in Abadan caused the death of an estimated 430 people. The opposition blamed the SAVAK and the regime's delayed response for the deaths. The regime blamed the opposition.<sup>157</sup> The Shah only reiterated that the 'deep plot' against his regime was fostered by foreign powers,<sup>158</sup> but named a new government. Jafar Sharif-Emami, the man selected to head the new government had, at best, a mixed reputation. He was known for being a pious and moderate person, but he had also been President of the Pahlavi Foundation, which coupled a façade of charitable work with astonishing levels of corruption.<sup>159</sup> In September, faced with an increasing number of demonstrations, the new government declared martial law. The announcement had been made late in the evening of September 7 and the demonstrators had gathered on the morning of September 8. Defying martial law, demonstrators marched to Jaleh Square in Tehran. A number of people anywhere between sixty-four and 4000 were killed<sup>160</sup> and, more generally, the Iranian population was 'appalled by the carnage.'<sup>161</sup> Finally Carter made his voice heard in Tehran, but the choice only compounded the Iranian shock. President Carter had taken some time off from the Camp David negotiations to call the Shah, reaffirming US

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<sup>156</sup> Telegram, Naas to Secretary of State, 'Uncertain Political Mood: religious developments, tougher royal line on demonstrations,' 1 August 1978, *DED*, Vol. 25,

[[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v25\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v25_text.pdf)] (accessed 13 August 2013).

<sup>157</sup> James Buchan, *Days of God* (London: John Murray, 2012), p. 207.

<sup>158</sup> BBC, SWB, Part 4, 9 September 1978.

<sup>159</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 127-128.

<sup>160</sup> The estimate of 4000 victims seems admittedly overblown, but there is no consensus in the literature. Many agree on a number between 64 and 84 deaths. See Abrahamian, *A History*, p. 160; and Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The life and Times of the Shah* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 465.

<sup>161</sup> Stempel, *Inside*, p. 123.

support. The news soon spread in Tehran, reinforcing the image of Carter as an enemy of Iran.<sup>162</sup>

The phone call was in line with a shift occurring in the policies of the Carter Administration. The Jaleh Square massacre had confirmed that the 'business as usual attitude' had become untenable. Confirming the cyclical nature of risk management, a reassessment of the Iranian situation led to the identification of a new target risk. The problems of the Shah were interpreted as a 'crisis of confidence.' Having identified its target risk, the need to avoid a breakdown of the Shah, the Administration proceeded to dismiss other countervailing risks inherent in its policies. As the Shah's troubles increased, members of the Administration continued to restate publicly their confidence in the Shah. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, Carter went on the record remarking on the importance of a strong Iran for the whole Western world and stressing his appreciation for the Shah's moves towards democracy.<sup>163</sup>

In Washington, most of the senior members of the Administration were still buying the Shah's claims that only communists and other extremists were opposing his regime.<sup>164</sup> 'Presidential cheerleading' of the Shah - as Bill called it<sup>165</sup> - continued. Several high level envoys travelled to Iran to strengthen the monarch and gauge his pulse. High-level visits were considered the best option for the Shah's dangerous predicament.<sup>166</sup> Not everybody agreed. The Shah himself had recognised that both the visits and the statements of support were becoming counterproductive. US statements were turning him

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<sup>162</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 326.

<sup>163</sup> President Carter, 'Press Conference,' 10 October 1978, *Department of State Bulletin*, November 1978, [<http://www.archive.org/details/departmentofstata7878unit>] (accessed 13 August 2013), p. 12.

<sup>164</sup> Glad, *An Outsider*, p. 168.

<sup>165</sup> James A. Bill, 'Iran and the crisis of '78,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Winter 1978), p. 342.

<sup>166</sup> Memo, Dodson C. to Cabinet, 'PRC Meeting on Secretary Blumenthal's Trip to the Middle East, Nov. 9, 1978,' 6 November 1978, NLC-20-19-2-4-3, JCL.

into a US puppet; he seemed dependent on the US. The frequent visits increased the US profile in Iran and overcrowded the Tehran circuit due to the massive security measures applied for each visit.<sup>167</sup> But the practice continued. Even more worrisome, such staunch attitudes of support for the Shah had been accompanied, especially throughout 1978, by the dismissal of the opposition.

#### **6.3.4 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 4: the opposition's grandiose projects vs. the Shah's faltering rule**

In his memoirs Vance wrote that as late as October 1978:

The Shah's failing self-confidence was the main reason I hesitated to recommend that Sullivan get in touch with the most important opposition leaders.<sup>168</sup>

The evidence, however, suggests that the treatment of the opposition went well beyond simple hesitation. Managing the risks inherent in the Shah's failing self-confidence, the Administration dismissed long-term countervailing risks inherent in the dismissal of several openings and pleas coming from the opposition.

The pattern had been established at the end of 1977. Shortly before the Shah's meeting with Carter in Washington, Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, a leading figure in the opposition, had approached Robert Mantel, a State Department official. Ghotbzadeh had made clear that opposition to the Shah was widespread in Iran, but that the Carter Administration, with its emphasis on human rights, was still in time to disentangle itself from identification with the regime.<sup>169</sup> The State Department official ignored the meeting and did not report it to his superiors until more than a year later.<sup>170</sup> 1978 was the

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<sup>167</sup> Sick, 'Chronology – November 1978,' NLC-25-37-6-1-7, JCL.

<sup>168</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 326.

<sup>169</sup> Memo, Robert Mantel to Henry Precht, 'Contact with Sadegh Ghotbzadeh in November 1977,' Jan. 17, 1979, *DED*, Vol. 18, [[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v18\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v18_text.pdf)] (accessed 13 August 2013).

<sup>170</sup> Harris, *Crisis*, p. 88.

crucial year. At the start of the year, Ibrahim Yazdi, Khomeini's spokesperson in the US, and Richard Cottam, a scholar sympathetic towards groups opposing the Shah, were ready to meet with the State Department. No one came forward. A meeting would have violated the policy of unquestioned support for the Shah. According to Sick: 'Yazdi and Cottam felt insulted and concluded that their doubts about the US government's attitude toward the opposition had been amply confirmed.'<sup>171</sup> However, it was in Tehran that the real 'rebuffing' occurred.

As early as May 1978, Bazargan, leader of the LMI, approached John Stempel, political officer at the Tehran Embassy. The movement, Bazargan suggested, was clearly open to a compromise. The basis would be the 1906 constitution and a return to the constitutional monarchy guaranteed by it. The bottom line was that the LMI was ready to accept the monarchy if the Shah was ready to relinquish part of his power. The opening was received with incredulity and more generally dismissed. Stempel did not know whom the group represented or how trustworthy it was.<sup>172</sup> Other meetings with a similar pattern occurred.

In September, the Embassy dismissed a clear call for help from the opposition. Khomeini had been put under house arrest in exile in Iraq. The LMI suspected US involvement but asked for help. The large majority of the population hated the Shah, Bazargan reported, and the US should step in to help Iran through a difficult transition. LMI representatives asked for a high level meeting with the US government in which opposition leaders, including leaders of the religious opposition, could explain their view. Once again, they were rebuffed. Stempel, this time, replied that the US started from the premise that the Shah had a 'key role in the future political developments,' and that he represented the only 'force of stability and the

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<sup>171</sup> Sick, *All Fall*, p. 64.

<sup>172</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 'Bazargan-Tavakoli-Stempel,' 30 May 1978, *DED*, Vol. 24

[[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v24\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v24_text.pdf)] (accessed 13 August 2013), p. 12.

major factor towards democratic change.’ More generally, Stempel ridiculed the LMI representatives. He replied that ‘the idea of such a meeting seemed premature and somewhat grandiose.’ In his report, he added that LMI representatives believed that the US ‘could do anything it wanted to with respect to the Shah;’ something he found ridiculous.<sup>173</sup> What emerges from these meetings is that the opposition was still fragmented. Secular and liberal leaders were leading the anti-Shah opposition in Tehran and, although distrusting the Shah, they did not aim at a complete overthrow of the regime. At the same time, as David Buchan has recently written, the ‘religious protest was faltering’:

While successful in spreading the clerical protest beyond Qom, the demonstrations had never mustered more than a few thousand or gained a firm foothold in the capital.<sup>174</sup>

The opposition to the Shah had not yet coalesced around Khomeini. To be sure, years of mistrust between the US and Iran would have made a proactive US role extremely difficult, but not totally impossible.<sup>175</sup> These conversations, however, were reported to the Embassy and, then, to Washington. In the process, the attitude did not change, and officials generally underestimated the possibilities of the opposition. Reporting to Washington, Naas and Sullivan dismissed months of openings from the LMI as an ‘effort to get USG to pull LMI chestnuts out of fire.’<sup>176</sup> In October, the LMI came back to have a reply on its request for a high level meeting. No meeting was in sight.

After the appointment of Sharif-Emami as Prime-Minister, the pattern continued. Even more consequential, US officials extended their dismissive attitude to religious groups, and to both secular and religious efforts to form

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<sup>173</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, ‘Bazargan-Tavakoli-Stempel,’ 25 September 1978, *DED*, Vol. 24, pp. 31-33.

<sup>174</sup> Buchan, *Days*, p. 206.

<sup>175</sup> John Limbert, Email interview with the author, 17 May 2013.

<sup>176</sup> Telegram, Sullivan to Secretary of State, ‘Khomeini placed under house arrest. Liberation movement of Iran (LMI) seeks further US contacts,’ 25 September 1978, *DED*, Vol. 24, pp. 27-30.

a coalition government. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariat'madari – a leading figure of the moderate religious opposition - had sent an envoy to the Embassy to ascertain the US position on the new government. A potentially unprecedented deal, the envoy suggested, was in offing between moderate religious leaders headed by Shariat'madari and the Iranian Government. The deal included the effort to convince Khomeini (now in Paris) to 'go easy' on the opposition. The religious leadership was concerned that the situation of the country was deteriorating to the point where it endangered religious leaders' goals. Stempel's reply was that, in the Administration's mind, the 'stability and continuity represented by the Shah 'provided the best hope for a successful political liberalization.'<sup>177</sup>

Certainly, as the Shariat'madari opening makes clear, by the end of 1978 a determinant variable was the attitude of Khomeini, around whom the opposition was coalescing. Still, the US could have probably made a difference. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, Bazargan and other members of the opposition flew to Paris to ascertain Khomeini's attitude and to ask for the Ayatollah's moderation. In the meantime, an agreement between the opposition and Sharif-Emami seemed close. The most contested point was that the Shah would 'reign instead of rule', relinquishing some of his power. On this point, however, Sharif-Emami admitted that the Shah was exercising too much pressure on him, and certainly would request to remain Commander-in-Chief.<sup>178</sup> Two days later, in fact, the Shah gave clear signs of unwillingness to share power. He imposed all the ministers on Sharif-Emami and the opportunity was lost.<sup>179</sup> The impression from Sullivan's telegram is that had the Administration offered a cohesive policy and had it

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<sup>177</sup> Telegram, Sullivan to Secretary of State, 'Possible religious deal with GOI,' *DED*, Vol. 25, p. 71, [[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v25\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v25_text.pdf)] (accessed 16 August 2013).

<sup>178</sup> William Sullivan, Telegram to Secretary of State, 'Elements of GOI agreement with religious opposition,' *DED*, Vol. 25, pp. 95-99.

<sup>179</sup> William Sullivan, Telegram to Secretary of State, 'Political Developments,' 29 October 1978, *DED*, Vol. 25, pp. 100-101.

showed conviction in its approach, the monarch might have accepted a deal. As Barry Rubin wrote:

Rather than passively await the results of the Shah's endeavours, the United States might have chosen...to commit American prestige and influence in negotiations for a reform government with moderate opposition participation.<sup>180</sup>

The Embassy was initially shocked by the existence and the strength of a 'non-communist opposition.' The absence of a red hand, as Naas would later admit, 'flew in the face of everything we had believed for a long time.'<sup>181</sup> To this shock, the Embassy replied first with incredulity, often ridiculing the secular opposition's projects and, later, with a more sceptical approach on the opposition's prospects. As we have seen, the Embassy's behaviour built on (and was mutually reinforced by) policies in Washington. With these choices, when the Administration finally woke up to trouble in Iran, it had already lost the confidence of the opposition movements.<sup>182</sup>

### **6.3.5 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 5: risks of inaction vs. risks of action**

In a telegram to Washington on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1978, Sullivan warned the Administration that the possibility of abdication should not be totally excluded and asked guidance from Washington: military government or coalition government. The telegram finally sent the Administration into 'crisis mode.' The Special Coordination Committee (SCC) - the committee established at the start of the Administration to deal with crucial issues and crisis management,<sup>183</sup> chaired by Brzezinski - for the first time convened to discuss Iran. The immediate reaction, however, was again support. As Vance suggested, the Administration started to be paralysed by a 'brooding fear

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<sup>180</sup> Rubin, *Paved*, p. 231.

<sup>181</sup> Burr, 'Interview with Charles Naas,' FISOHA, 31 May 1988, p. 207.

<sup>182</sup> For a similar analysis see Rubin, *Paved*, p. 271.

<sup>183</sup> Jimmy Carter, 'Presidential Directive/NSC-2: The National Security Council System,' 20th January 1977

[<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/pddirectives/pd02.pdf>] (accessed 16 August 2013).



that any action that implied we did not expect the Shah to survive would contribute to his paralysis of will.<sup>184</sup> Brzezinski reported strong external pressure from interest groups led by the Rockefellers and criticism that the US was not doing enough for the Shah.<sup>185</sup> The message to Sullivan was paradoxical. Largely based on Brzezinski's points in the meeting,<sup>186</sup> it restated US support 'without reservations,' making clear that the US had no desire to second-guess the Shah, but it suggested that it was time for decisive action to restore order. Only with order restored, the message added, could the Shah go back to thinking about liberalisation.<sup>187</sup> In short, the message told the Shah to both crack-down and liberalise. After the SCC meeting, Vance gave a press conference in which he restated the message of support for the Shah. Brzezinski placed a phone call to the Shah in which he pledged US support and advised the Shah to exert strong leadership. As Sick admits, the government was speaking with one voice.<sup>188</sup> Contrary to studies portraying the Administration as paralysed by rivalries or subject to Brzezinski's predominance<sup>189</sup>, several meetings<sup>190</sup> and telegrams<sup>191</sup> demonstrated that the whole Administration was still focused on managing one target risk - the need to avoid any impression of reduced faith in the Shah's chances - and on adopting minimal measures, hoping that the Shah could ease the troubles on his own.

The situation in Iran, however, turned desperate. After a pathetic attempt to appease the opposition in a TV message on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November,<sup>192</sup> the Shah established a military government, but deprived it of any power. He also

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<sup>184</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 329.

<sup>185</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 363

<sup>186</sup> SCC Minutes, 'Iran,' 2 November 1978, NLC-25-95-8-11-2, JCL.

<sup>187</sup> Telegram, White House to American Embassy Tehran, 3 November 1978, NLC-SAFE 39 C-11-23-1-1, JCL.

<sup>188</sup> Sick, *All Fall*, p. 85.

<sup>189</sup> Glad, *An Outsider*; and Kaufman, *Plans*.

<sup>190</sup> Minutes, PRC 'Iran,' 6 November 1978, NLC-SAFE 39 D-38-99-4-5, JCL.

<sup>191</sup> Telegram, Secretary of State to American Embassy Bonn *et al.*, 'Message to Foreign Ministers,' 7 November 1978, NLC-16-114-1-56-6, JCL.

<sup>192</sup> 'Shah's Address to the Nation,' 6 November 1978, Collection 33, Brzezinski Donated, Box 38, Folder 1, JCL.

acted against elements of the establishment such as former leaders of SAVAK, losing the support of his last followers and giving the opposition the impression of being both weak and a traitor.<sup>193</sup> Perceiving danger, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, Sullivan sent the famous 'Thinking the Unthinkable Telegram.' For the first time, Sullivan suggested that the US might have to think about an Iranian future without the Shah, and that a compromise between the military and the religious leadership might be the only acceptable way forward, with Khomeini returning as a 'Gandhi-like figure.'<sup>194</sup> To be sure, Sullivan's forecast was way off the mark, but the effects of the telegram on US policy were minimal. The prospect of the 'unthinkable' did not move the Administration.

With the stream of reports from Sullivan getting worse, the Administration found itself in a condition of deep uncertainty. More specifically, the consequences of traditional intelligence biases, of recent dynamics and of the dismissal of the opposition - like Beck's boomerang effect - had proverbially come back to haunt the centres of decision. Sick complained to Brzezinski that the 'lack of hard information' on developments in Iran was staggering.<sup>195</sup> Similarly, Brzezinski wrote to Carter that the intelligence community had been 'ill-prepared' for developments in Iran, and that the 'seeds' of the crisis had been visible for months.<sup>196</sup> In the Policy Review Committee (PRC) meeting on November 6, Vance and Brzezinski agreed that one of the main problems had been a lack of information on the opposition and its strength. Stansfield Turner, the CIA director, tried to justify the intelligence performance pointing the finger at the long-established alliance with the Shah and the fact that it had hindered intelligence collection.<sup>197</sup> As we have seen, Turner's response was, at least, partially correct. Unsatisfied, Brzezinski convinced Carter to write a note to the main cabinet members to

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<sup>193</sup> Stempel, *Inside*.

<sup>194</sup> Sick, 'Chronology - November 1978,' NLC-25-37-6-1-7, JCL

<sup>195</sup> Sick, *All Fall*, p. 90.

<sup>196</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, Memorandum for the President, 'Iran: Intelligence performance,' 10 November 10, 1978, NLC-15-71-5-7-5, JCL.

<sup>197</sup> Minutes, PRC 'Iran,' 6 November 1978, NLC-SAFE 39 D-38-99-4-5, JCL.

complain about the intelligence performance.<sup>198</sup> In spite of his strong position, however, even Brzezinski remained more concerned about Soviet moves than about Iranian ones. He told Carter that the Administration should have improved intelligence on Soviet (not Iranian) capabilities and intentions,<sup>199</sup> and that it should have warned the Soviets that any interference would have represented a 'matter of the utmost gravity.'<sup>200</sup> In the midst of Iran's turmoil, uncertainty as to both Iranian and Soviet moves prevailed. The press soon picked up the leaked Presidential note, and assaulted Turner for the intelligence failure and the Administration for its approach to Iran.<sup>201</sup>

With no clear policy and under pressure, the Administration started to split on the Iranian issue. Vance and others at State, building on Sullivan's scenario, started to suggest that the US might have to move towards brokering an agreement.<sup>202</sup> Brzezinski demonstrated only contempt for Sullivan's 'Pollyannaish' scenario.<sup>203</sup> He started to rely on private channels to the Shah, through Iranian Ambassador to the US Ardeshir Zahedi and to hope for an 'iron fist' solution.<sup>204</sup> By the start of December 1978, the choice confronting the Administration was clear. The US could either take an active role or could continue on its path of minimalism and inaction. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, Sullivan wrote that:

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<sup>198</sup> Sick, 'Chronology – November 1978,' NLC-25-37-6-1-7, JCL. To be sure, as Brzezinski made clear in his memoirs, he had played a key role in limiting the role of Turner and of the intelligence community in Presidential decision-making, excluding Turner from the President's intelligence briefings. Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 64.

<sup>199</sup> Brzezinski, 'Iran: Intelligence performance.'

<sup>200</sup> The recommendation followed a message from Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev warning the United States against interference. Memo, Brzezinski to the President, 'Iran,' 17 November 1978, NLC-17-87-4-8-6, JCL.

<sup>201</sup> William Safire, 'Adm. Turner's failures,' 22 November 1978, Collection 33, Brzezinski Donated, Box 23, Folder 6, JCL.

<sup>202</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 330.

<sup>203</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 366.

<sup>204</sup> Memo, Brzezinski to the President, 'Iran.'

An active US intervention into the center of the negotiations process would signal to sophisticated Persians that the US is prepared to accept some solution in Iran which foresees something other than the position which the Shah currently offered.

Certainly, it would have been difficult to convince the opposition (especially, one could argue, after one year of total rebuffing), but that could be the most feasible alternative.<sup>205</sup> The day after Sullivan's telegram, however, the Administration showed all its doubts when Carter replied to a question regarding the Shah's chances of survival with: 'I don't know. I hope so. This is something that is in the hands of the people of Iran.'<sup>206</sup> The reply was a honest assessment, but it had a massive effect in Iran. The opposition was emboldened, and the King was 'plunged into deep depression'.<sup>207</sup>

In December, in fact, the demonstrations had turned massive. The month of Moharram, in which Muslims commemorate the assassination of Hossein, brought millions of people onto the streets of Tehran. The US media started to report on the crisis with extreme attention. According to the *Washington Post*, the demonstrations showed impressive organisational skills and an ability to maintain order. They were 'an unmistakable show of no confidence in the monarch.' Demonstrators talked to journalists and admitted that they were dismayed by the monarch's and by the US government's behaviour. 'The Shah should have got the message a long time ago – 15 years ago. Maybe his palace is so big he cannot hear the people.' Others added, 'more than the Shah, the Americans should get the message.' Some were even helping the 'communications' with the Administration. Banners read 'No communists, we are Muslims.'<sup>208</sup> The US government did not listen. Carter, once again, went on the record exposing the US choice of a

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<sup>205</sup> Gary Sick, 'Chronology – 3-31 Dec. 1978,' NLC-25-37-7-1-6, JCL.

<sup>206</sup> Jimmy Carter, 'Interview With the President at a Breakfast With Members of the White House Correspondents Association,' 7 December 1978, [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=30273>] (accessed 16 August 2013).

<sup>207</sup> Memo, Sullivan to the White House, Dec. 8, 1978. NLC-2-15-4-1-8

<sup>208</sup> Jonathan C. Randal, 'Huge march in Tehran is peaceful,' *The Washington Post*, 11 December 1978.

minimalist position and suggesting that he had complete faith in the Shah's ability to stay on the throne.<sup>209</sup> As Sullivan reported, however, the Shah was unable to make up his mind. Sullivan encouraged a more active role for the US, through a national coalition or a Council of Notables.<sup>210</sup> In line with this effort, Henry Precht from the State Department met with Ibrahim Yazdi, who warned that the stubborn support for the Shah posed risks for the future US-Iran relations and for the safety of Americans in Iran.<sup>211</sup>

Confirmation of the need to move forward also came from an unlikely source. At the start of December, Brzezinski had asked George Ball to have a look at the Iranian situation and to file a report. To Brzezinski's dismay, Ball's report suggested a policy not too dissimilar from the State Department's. In the SCC meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, Ball warned that the Shah had been 'irreparably damaged' and suggested the creation of a Council of Notables with reduced powers for the Shah. In particular, Ball stressed the immediate necessity of establishing a 'disavowable channel' to Khomeini, who, by that time, led the opposition. 'There is no easy or risk-free way to deal with the situation,' Ball added, 'it is necessary to balance the risks on either side.' Brzezinski antagonised Ball throughout the meeting suggesting a 'wait and see' attitude.<sup>212</sup> In his memoirs, Brzezinski hinted that his suggestions of restraint were based not so much on cool analysis but on his preference for a military government. Arguing in favour of a military government or a military solution was hard. The only possibility was presenting it as a last resort. In his arguments, then, he would proceed to discredit other solutions, simply to make the 'iron fist' option more

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<sup>209</sup> Jimmy Carter, 'The President's News Conference,' 12 December 1978, [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=30291>] (accessed 15 August 2013).

<sup>210</sup> Sick, 'Chronology – 3-31 Dec. 1978.'

<sup>211</sup> Memo to the Files, Henry Precht, 'Conversation with Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi, Adviser to Khomeini, Dec. 12, 1978,' 13 December 1978, *DED, Vol. 18*, [[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v18\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v18_text.pdf)] (accessed 16 August 2013).

<sup>212</sup> SCC Meeting, 'Iran,' 13 December 1978, Collection 33, Brzezinski Donated, Box 29, Folder 11, JCL.

palatable.<sup>213</sup> Ball and Warren Christopher, who was substituting for Vance, stressed the urgency of a decision, suggesting that there was only a narrow window of opportunity. With Secretary of Defense Brown supporting Brzezinski, however, caution won the day. Carter agreed; he was unwilling to tell another head of state what to do.<sup>214</sup>

Lower ranking officials within the Administration perceived the risks inherent in inactivity. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, in a Mini-SCC meeting, David Aaron, from NSC, and Harold Saunders from State agreed that although senior officials found the prospects of an active role ‘unappetising,’ the time had come to make a decision.<sup>215</sup> On the same day, however, the Administration confirmed its lack of any long-term plan. Sullivan had asked for instructions on which was the best alternative among military rule, civilian government, and a Council of Notables. The Administration’s reply was that the Shah could do as he felt.<sup>216</sup> The only decision taken was to send General Robert Huyser, Deputy US European Commander, to Iran as a strong sign of the Administration’s support for the government. In spite of some uncertainty surrounding Huyser’s instructions, it seems that the General should have convinced the military to support the government and, in case of failure, he should have helped staging a coup.<sup>217</sup> In the first days of January, the Shah had finally named a new Prime Minister, Shahpour Bakhtiar. Being a ‘puppet’ of the Shah, he started from an unpromising position, but the Administration maintained the behaviour that had characterised its approach to Iran: rejection of the opposition, blind support for the government, and Cold War myopia.

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<sup>213</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 374.

<sup>214</sup> Gary Sick, ‘Chronology 3-31 December 1978, 13 December’, NLC-25-37-7-1-6, JCL.

<sup>215</sup> Mini-SCC Meeting, ‘Iran,’ 29 December 1978, NLC-25-98-7-4-6, JCL.

<sup>216</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 375.

<sup>217</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 379. See also Huyser, *Mission to Tehran*. William Quandt has recently suggested that the mission remains one of the darkest secrets of the Administration. William Quandt, Interview with the author, 19 July 2012, Charlottesville (VA).

First, no contact with the opposition was established. After a few days in Iran, even Huyser understood that contacts with Khomeini were necessary. He wrote to Washington that the Iranian military agreed that contacts with Khomeini needed to have the 'highest priority,' and that the Bakhtiar government could not succeed without this ingredient.<sup>218</sup> A cohesive block now seemed to support this option, including Sullivan, Vance,<sup>219</sup> and US personnel in Iran. Organised with speed and efficiency in a clear demonstration that action was possible, the Eliot Mission aimed at a direct meeting between former State Department official Ted Eliot and Khomeini to urge the Ayatollah to moderate his demands and to give Bakhtiar time to work. Brzezinski takes credit in his memoirs first for having delayed the mission, and second for having convinced Carter – who was meeting in Guadeloupe with the leaders of Western Europe – to cancel it. As usual, Brzezinski argued that a meeting would have demoralised Bakhtiar and the military.<sup>220</sup> Only an indirect contact was established through Warren Zimmerman, a political officer at the American Embassy in Paris, who knew nothing about Iran and less about Khomeini.<sup>221</sup>

The abortion of the mission entailed both strategic and political risks for the Administration. Surprisingly, the Shah himself made some of the risks clear. Shocked by the decision, the Shah had asked Sullivan how the US expected to influence the revolutionary leadership if they refused to talk with them. Sullivan's only reply at the time had been a vitriolic telegram to Carter that almost cost him his job. From this point, Carter completely lost confidence in his Ambassador.<sup>222</sup> The President, in fact, had agreed with the cancellation. He wrote in his diary at the time. 'We're sticking with the Shah until we see some clear alternative.'<sup>223</sup> Clear alternatives were in sight, and had been in sight for the previous two years, but the Administration was

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<sup>218</sup> Telegram, Huyser to Secretary of Defense Brown and CJCS Jones, 12 January 1979, NLC-6-29-3-25-4, JCL.

<sup>219</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 336.

<sup>220</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 380.

<sup>221</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 336.

<sup>222</sup> Sullivan, *Mission*, p. 226, and Carter, *White*, p. 276.

<sup>223</sup> Carter, *White*, p. 272.

still unable to change course. This failing policy also confronted the Administration with short-term political risks. The media, in fact, were attacking the Administration. The US, the *Washington Post* wrote, interpreting the general mood, was one of the few countries to continue 'its policy of all out support for the Shah, even at the risk of jeopardizing the lives of US nationals' in Iran, 'where protests are turning increasingly xenophobic.'<sup>224</sup>

Second, the Administration demonstrated again a penchant for short-term measures and minimalism. The Shah left Iran on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, completely discredited by the strength of the Revolution. The State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research had forewarned the Administration suggesting that in the Iranian chaos Bakhtiar's chances were slim since he did not have the support of Khomeini or of other Ayatollahs.<sup>225</sup> The Administration knew that Bakhtiar's chances were extremely low and that his moves to win the opposition's support were a 'strategy of desperation,' and yet it desperately put all its weight behind this last horse.<sup>226</sup> Carter went repeatedly on the record stressing two main points. First, the US had full confidence in Bakhtiar and hoped for positive developments.<sup>227</sup> Again, the media exposed the foolishness of this position, stressing how the US had remained the only country with any faith in Bakhtiar.<sup>228</sup> Second, the US and the 'American people' did not have the resources, the capacity, or the willingness to deliberately interfere with the situation in Iran. 'We have no desire nor ability,' he stated:

To intrude massive forces into Iran...to determine the outcome of domestic political issues. This is something that we have no

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<sup>224</sup> Jonathan C. Randal, 'US faith in the Shah turned into liability,' *The Washington Post*, 13 January 1979.

<sup>225</sup> Bureau of Intelligence and Research Analysis, 'Bakhtiar's prospects in Iran,' 5 January 1979. NLC-SAFE 17 C-16-9-8-9, JCL.

<sup>226</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 340

<sup>227</sup> Jim Hoagland, 'Carter pledges support to new Iran Government,' *The Washington Post*, 18 January 1979.

<sup>228</sup> Jim Hoagland, 'US Specialist questions wisdom of Policy on Iran,' *The Washington Post*, 3 January 1979.



intention of ever doing in another country. We've tried this once in Vietnam. It didn't work well, as you well know.<sup>229</sup>

The Vietnam analogy came up several times in Carter's interviews and public speeches as a justification for US minimalism and inaction.<sup>230</sup> As often during the Iran debate, these statements presented the choice as trade-off between a risky choice and a risk-free choice. The President often described the Administration's policy as one of neutrality.<sup>231</sup> As Ball had understood, however, there was no risk-free alternative. What the Administration did not realize was that with its choices it was already taking sides. In particular, the Administration seemed, once again, to take the side of repression. With strikes and demonstrations crippling the Bakhtiar government, in a replay of the 'tear gas decision,' the Administration arranged the shipment of 200,000 barrels of gasoline and diesel to Iran, 'to keep military and government vehicles running.'<sup>232</sup> In Iran, the decision confirmed the role of the Administration as an enemy of the Revolution. To be sure, Brzezinski's push for a military solution ran against this minimalism, but his position came not from a better understanding of the Iranian situation, but from the conviction that either the Soviets were behind the Iranian turmoil, or they could take advantage from it.<sup>233</sup>

Connected to this point, the third choice made by the Administration reduced Bakhtiar's chances, with a final dash of 'Cold War myopia.' In the instructions for Sullivan and Huyser to deal with the new government, Brzezinski wrote that 'basic US support' remained unchanged. But the

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<sup>229</sup> Jimmy Carter, 'The President's News Conference,' 17 January 1979, [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32324>] (accessed 16 August 2013).

<sup>230</sup> Jimmy Carter, 'Interview with John Chancellor,' 13 January 1979, Collection 99, Jody Powell donated, Box 29, JCL.

<sup>231</sup> President Carter, 'Press Conference,' 26 January 1979, *Department of State Bulletin*, March 1979, [<http://www.archive.org/details/departmentofstata7979unit>] (accessed 16 August 2013), p. 30.

<sup>232</sup> Jim Hoagland, 'Hill Report on Iran faults Carter,' *The Washington Post*, 25 January 1979.

<sup>233</sup> See Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'Interview with CBS,' 2 May 1978, Coll. 13, NSA, Box 2, Folder 2, JCL; and Brzezinski, 'NSC Weekly Report #57.'

instructions also made clear that the new government should have been prevented from including any opposition leaders, either secular or religious, and should have put a premium on the attitude towards the West.<sup>234</sup> With no credibility and no chances to extend his support, Bakhtiar was doomed. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, the Revolution was completed with the return of Khomeini to Iran and the appointment, by Khomeini, of a parallel government, with Bazargan as Prime Minister. With its short-term measures, its minimalism, and with its continuous efforts to manage the target risks of a weakened Iranian government, the Administration had chosen the wrong side of the Revolution.

### **6.3.6 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 6: Revolutionary Government vs. the Shah**

#### **6.3.6.1 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 6a: 'smoke signals' vs. bombshells**

One day after the departure of the Shah, Harold Saunders, from the State Department, had been summoned by Congress to justify the dreadful performance of the Administration. Saunders had argued that the Administration had always been committed to a 'free, stable and independent,' Iran and that the Administration was, now, ready to cooperate with the new government. The effort backfired. In what would soon become a popular refrain, Congressmen from the right criticised the Administration for not having done enough for the Shah. Congressman Paul Findley (R-IL) criticised the Administration for its intelligence performance and for a lack of 'great power' attitude. From the left, Congressman Gerry Studds (D-Mass) charged that the US had been crucial in keeping in power 'one of the most absolute, brutal, and total dictators,' arming him for the previous 30 years. Deep anti-Americanism was more than understandable:

When was the last time we were committed to a free Iran? How could you convince any Iranian we were committed to a free Iran?

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<sup>234</sup> Memo, Brzezinski to Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, 'Guidance to Sullivan/Huyser,' 19 January 1979, Collection 33, Brzezinski donated, Box 20, Folder 1, JCL.

'It seems to me,' Congressman Donald Pease (D-OH) concluded,

That we are at this point putting the best light that we can on a bad situation by saying, well, things have gone wrong, but we agree on basics and sooner or later we will get back together.<sup>235</sup>

This was precisely the policy chosen by the Administration. It started from the assumption that all was well for the US in Iran. And, even more problematic, it tried to make amends for previous mistake with a vengeance; what Bill calls 'suffocation by embrace.'<sup>236</sup> US officials and businessmen started to return in force to Iran, building on the assumption that the new government and the people would be grateful.<sup>237</sup>

This conclusion, however, built on extremely shaky foundations. The situation of the US and of the intelligence community was one of deep uncertainty. Uncertainty concerned both lack of knowledge of (and impossibility of knowing) the situation in Iran; and uncertainty as to the consequences of possible US action. As to the latter, the options were spelled out in a tense SCC meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February. As we have seen in **Chapter 3**, uncertainty led to the development of options. After suggestions from Huyser, three options were taken into account. Option A assumed accommodation between the military and Bazargan, with the US trying to extract concessions. Option B assumed no role for the US with the military remaining in the barracks to let the political situation play out. Option C assumed a military coup. In spite of concerns that the military did not have the willingness or ability to carry out a coup, Brzezinski remained of the opinion that the US should have acted 'like a big power.' This, he acknowledged, might have created a dangerous risk of escalation in the

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<sup>235</sup> US House of Representative, 'US Policy toward Iran, January 1979,' Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 96<sup>th</sup> Congress, First session, January 1979 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 33, p. 40 and p. 48.

<sup>236</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 272.

<sup>237</sup> 'Iran Update,' 16 July, 1979, *DED*, Vol. 4

[[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v04\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v04_text.pdf)] (accessed 16 August 2013).

[[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v04\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v04_text.pdf)] (accessed 16 August 2013), p. 12.

short-term, but it could have strengthened the US role in the region in the longer-term.<sup>238</sup> Brzezinski continued to push for a military solution. However, even on this score, as on contacts with Khomeini, Huyser disappointed him, stressing that the only chance of a military solution was through 'total material support' from the US.<sup>239</sup> This solution had always been unacceptable for Carter who had a keen sense of the possibility of escalation.<sup>240</sup> More generally, uncertainty as to the possibility of Soviet reaction and as to the consequences of a stronger involvement ranked high among the officials at the meeting. As to lack of knowledge, the US lacked the information and had no possibility of collecting it. 'We simply don't have the bios,' Henry Precht wrote, 'ignorance of events in Iran is massive.'<sup>241</sup> Questions such as 'What is an Ayatollah?' were the norm at meetings attended by senior foreign policy officials.<sup>242</sup>

Furthermore, the US efforts to collect information were rebuffed. The Embassy in Iran had been a 'symbol of everything the nascent upheaval hated and feared,'<sup>243</sup> a den of spies. After an attack on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, Ambassador Sullivan had left the country. The Embassy had been reinforced with new defensive installations. Officials were now working in a reinforced compound. 'Americans inside saw these changes as purely defensive; the picture they presented strongly encouraged suspicion.'<sup>244</sup> US personnel, reduced throughout the revolution, now flooded Iran, many lured by the

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<sup>238</sup> SCC, Minutes, 11 February 1979.

<sup>239</sup> Memo for the record, 'Secure Conference Phone Call with General Huyser in Europe and General Jones and Deputy Secretary of Defense Duncan,' 11 February, 1979, Collection 33, Brzezinski donated, Box 29, Folder 15, JCL.

<sup>240</sup> Dumbrell, *The Carter*, p. 166.

<sup>241</sup> Letter, Henry Precht to Laingen, 'Official-Informal-Confidential,' 20 July 1979, *DED*, Vol. 15, [[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v15\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v15_text.pdf)] (accessed 16 August 2013), p. 127.

<sup>242</sup> Henry Precht, 'The Iranian Revolution: an oral history with Henry Precht, then State Department Desk Officer,' *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Winter 2004), p. 16.

<sup>243</sup> Bowden, *Guests*, p. 4.

<sup>244</sup> Bowden, *Guests*, p. 7.

possible career prospects inherent in a dangerous post such as Tehran.<sup>245</sup> Efforts at collecting information, however, went nowhere. And what is more, these efforts were coupled with a remarkable lack of good signs from Washington. The new chargé d'affaires in Tehran, Bruce Laingen, had soon lamented that the Administration was not sending positive signals to the new government. 'Public noises from the government concerning us,' he wrote, 'have recently been generally positive.' 'I am cordially received at all levels,' he added. For this reason, the Iranian government was expecting some positive 'smoke signals' from the US.<sup>246</sup> But none had been received.

The US soon remained the only great power not officially recognising the Revolution. In a SCC meeting, the Administration had concluded that no note of recognition would be sent to the new government. It was against US practice and it was considered unnecessary for the new government.<sup>247</sup> Washington delayed the nomination of a new Ambassador. More crucially, the US, building on the assumption of the 'irrationality' of the clerics, continued to refuse to meet with Khomeini, although other great powers, including the Soviet Union, did. The Administration had also betrayed early promises to the Revolutionary Government, such as the delivery of spare parts. Furthermore, Iranian authorities charged, US officials in Iran continued to provide visas to the former Shah's men and to US contacts, but not to people with medical needs. When the US policy on visas changed it did not improve the situation. US personnel started to consider visa applications only if the applicant satisfied US intelligence needs.<sup>248</sup> 'Unfortunately,' Bazargan told Laingen, 'the US had not responded in any positive way that the PGOI [Provisional Government of Iran] could use to demonstrate the worth of its relationship with US to the Iranian people.'

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<sup>245</sup> See Bowden, *Guests* and Farber, *Taken*, p. 6.

<sup>246</sup> Memo, Laingen to Secretary of State, date unclear, *DED*, Vol. 7, pp. 277-279.

<sup>247</sup> SCC, 'Summary of conclusions,' 13 February 1979, Collection 33, Brzezinski donated, Box 29, Folder 18, JCL.

<sup>248</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 288.

'You have only given lip service to better relations,' he added, 'and we have only heard promises from you.'<sup>249</sup>

Noises from Washington were far from encouraging. When the nomination of a new Ambassador seemed close and a meeting with Khomeini seemed possible,<sup>250</sup> the US Senate passed the Javits Resolution (from Congressman Jacob Javits, R-NY, who presented it) condemning executions carried out by the new regime. For the Iranian government, the resolution was a clear sign of US hypocrisy. Where was the Senate when the firing squads were the Shah's ones?<sup>251</sup> Foreign Minister Yazdi defined the resolution as a direct intervention in Iran's internal affairs and a source of deep concern for the new government.<sup>252</sup> The resolution was particularly hideous since Javits' wife used to work for the Shah.<sup>253</sup> Similarly, Senator Henry Jackson (D-WA) on *Meet the Press* assured the public that the revolution was not going to last and Iran was on the path towards disintegration.<sup>254</sup> As Laingen wrote, the interview 'hit the upper levels of the foreign ministry as a bombshell.'<sup>255</sup> If these developments were certainly beyond the Administration's possibilities of control, no clear positive smoke signal followed.

This choice was remarkably short-sighted. The moderates, such as Bazargan, were the only ones willing to continue a cordial relationship with the US, but the rise of fundamentalism and the lack of US 'forthcomingness' continuously undermined their position. The new government, the Deputy Prime Minister told Laingen, was having difficulties in 'controlling the emotionalism' of the Iranian press and public opinion. The US could have

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<sup>249</sup> Bruce Laingen, Telegram to Secretary of State, 'Meeting with PM Bazargan,' 12 August 1979, *DED*, Vol. 18, pp. 30-31.

<sup>250</sup> Burr, 'Interview with Charles Naas,' FISOHA, p. 263

<sup>251</sup> Bill, *The Eagle*, p. 284.

<sup>252</sup> BBC, SWB, Part 4, 23 May, 1979.

<sup>253</sup> Burr, 'Interview with Metrisko,' p. 169

<sup>254</sup> Ira Shapiro has recently written that from the start of the Carter Administration, Jackson's 'overriding priority' was to become Carter's main adversary on national security. Shapiro, *The Last*, p. 60.

<sup>255</sup> Bruce Laingen, Telegram to Secretary of State, 'The Shah in the US,' 28 October 1979, *DED*, Vol. 7, pp. 288-291.

done more to solve the 'misunderstanding.' Private expressions of support (from Laingen) were fine, but US officials should have done more to make public the 'private expressions of understanding.'<sup>256</sup> In this sense, the US government adopted contradictory and short-term policies. Starting from the assumption that the US position in Iran was relatively safe, it made the contacts with the moderates in Iran visible. This discredited the moderates in the eyes of the Iranian population and of the clerics. At the same time, however, it refused policies that could strengthen the hands of the moderates and could demonstrate the value of cooperation with the US. The situation slightly improved in the following months with meetings with Yazdi, and at the military level. Furthermore, as Mark Gasiorowski has demonstrated, several meetings occurred with the purpose of intelligence exchanges.<sup>257</sup> From May 1979 onwards, the US shared information with Iranian authorities on local uprisings in Iran and, in October 1979, on the possibility of an Iraqi attack.<sup>258</sup> Similarly, as Christian Emery has recently suggested, the United States continued the policy of meeting with moderate figures in Iran but these meetings were informed more by US Cold War needs than by an understanding of the volatile situation in Iran.<sup>259</sup> The admission of the Shah to New York derailed any positive development.

#### *6.3.6.2 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 6b: the Shah in New York vs. the Americans in Iran*

When the Shah left Iran, the Administration extended an invitation to take refuge in the United States. The Shah had refused, preferring to remain in the Middle East. According to Vance, the decision aimed at punishing the

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<sup>256</sup> Telegram, American Embassy Tehran to Secretary of State, 'Meeting with Dep. PM Tabatabai,' 16 August 1979, *DED*, Vol. 18.

<sup>257</sup> Sick, Email exchange with the author.

<sup>258</sup> Mark Gasiorowski, 'US Intelligence Assistance to Iran, May-October 1979,' *Middle East Journal*, Volume 66, No. 4 (Autumn 2012), pp. 613-627. See also David Crist, *The Twilight War* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), Chapter 1.

<sup>259</sup> Emery, *US Foreign Policy*.

Administration for previous mistakes, and at humiliating Carter<sup>260</sup>. More likely, the Shah remained in the Middle East with hopes of eventually regaining the throne.<sup>261</sup> The Shah had stopped first in Egypt and then in Morocco, where it was clear that the King was not welcomed. At the same time, Henry Kissinger had started a campaign to pressure the Administration to admit the Shah: 'We owe the Shah of Iran at least the decency of recognizing that he was a good friend.'<sup>262</sup> When the difficulties in Morocco increased, the Pahlavis unleashed all their resources. Princess Ashraf, the sister of the Shah, contacted David Rockefeller, a long-time friend of the Shah, and Henry Kissinger. The group increased the pressure. The Administration was not convinced. Carter and his advisers understood that the admission entailed a risk of hostage taking,<sup>263</sup> and imperilled the long-term relationship with the Revolutionary Government.

Pressure from the Kissinger group increased. The New York attorney and Washington 'wise man' John McCloy wrote to the State Department and to Brzezinski, to push for admission. Any failure to do so, he warned, or 'any equivocation' would be taken as 'persuasive evidence of our unreliability as protector of our former allies.' McCloy explicitly dismissed the existence of a trade-off, between the admission of the Shah and risks for the Americans. The problem for the US government, he wrote, was not so much

Convenience or inconvenience, or even of risk to its property or its personnel. It relates to the integrity, the standing and in the longer range, perhaps, to the security of the United States itself.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Vance, *Hard*, p. 302.

<sup>261</sup> Sullivan, *Mission*, p. 241.

<sup>262</sup> 'AM-Iran-Kissinger,' Collection 33, Brzezinski Donated, Box 12, Folder 1, JCL.

<sup>263</sup> Telegram, Secretary of State to American Embassy Rabat, 'Shah's travel,' 7 March 1979, NLC-16-115-5-29-1, JCL.

<sup>264</sup> Letters exchange, McCloy to Warren Christopher and Zbigniew Brzezinski, 16-27 April 1979, White House Central Files, Box CO-31, CO 71, Confidential 1/20/77-1/20/81, JCL.



The Administration confirmed its refusal, showing an understanding of the Iranian government's suspicions.<sup>265</sup> McCloy, Kissinger, and Rockefeller established a sort of 'committee' to increase the pressure both publicly and privately. Every few weeks, Kissinger would release a public statement condemning the Administration. 'A man who for 37 years was a friend of the United States,' he made clear at a Harvard Business School dinner, 'should not be treated like a Flying Dutchman who cannot find a port of call.'<sup>266</sup> The committee also arranged the travel of the Shah to Mexico, making the issue harder to ignore. Questioned by Vance on the possibility of the Shah's admission, Laingen was clear. He wrote that Iran depended on the 'whims and ultimate control of the Ayatollah.' In the prevailing atmosphere of suspicion, the US remained a 'convenient scapegoat.' Giving refuge to the Shah would trigger demonstrations against the Embassy, with the risk that the attacks might even go beyond the one in February. To be sure, Laingen was not opposed to the admission in itself, but he warned that the Administration needed to look at long-term risks. 'We need some added cushion,' he wrote, 'before we accept whatever risks there may be for our interests in doing what I believe we eventually should do – allow the Shah refuge in the US.'<sup>267</sup>

In August, Princess Ashraf wrote a letter to Carter criticising the Administration for its subservience to the Ayatollah's blackmail.<sup>268</sup> Rockefeller and Kissinger started to call Brzezinski daily to push for admission. According to Thomas Pickering, Assistant Secretary of State at the time, the intensity of this pressure 'bulldozed,' 'completely

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<sup>265</sup> Memo, Saunders to Newsom, 'USG attitude on Visas for the Shah's family and immediate entourage,' 18 April 1979, *DED*, Vol. 7, p. 269.

<sup>266</sup> Don Oberdorfer, 'The making of a crisis,' *The Washington Post*, 11 November, 1979.

<sup>267</sup> Telegram, Laingen to Sec of State, 'Shah's desire to reside in the US,' 28 July 1979, *DED*, Vol. 7, pp. 272-273.

<sup>268</sup> Letter, from Princess Ashraf Pahlavi to the President, 8 August 1979, JCL-WHCF, Coll. 34 – Subject Files, Box CO-31, Folder - Exec., CO 71 7/1/79-11/30/79.

overwhelmed' the Administration.<sup>269</sup> As Brzezinski made clear in his memoirs, serious political risks were also involved in the decision. Kissinger had started to play with Carter's political fortunes. He linked the admission of the Shah to a positive attitude towards the incoming SALT vote.<sup>270</sup> The administration, however, had assured Yazdi that, in spite of strong pressures there had been no change of policy.<sup>271</sup>

The discovery of the Shah's illness completely altered the scenario. Laingen wrote to Vance that news of the illness would not have any 'ameliorative effect' on Iranian reaction.<sup>272</sup> The Shah's sickness, however, fully exposed the political risk that declining admission entailed. 'Mr. President,' Hamilton Jordan told Carter, 'if the Shah dies in Mexico, can you imagine the field day that Kissinger will have with it? He will say first that you caused the Shah's downfall and now you've killed him.' The President initially rejected the political argument. According to Jordan, the President exploded: 'To hell with Henry Kissinger. I am the President of this country.'<sup>273</sup> One by one, however, his advisors shifted sides and started to support the admission. Carter was the last to concede. 'What are you guys going to advise me to do,' he asked his main advisors on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, 'if they overrun our Embassy and take our people hostage?'<sup>274</sup>

President Carter recently suggested that two main factors contributed to his acceptance: the humanitarian concerns and the assurances from the Iranian authorities that the security of the Americans could be guaranteed.<sup>275</sup> If

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<sup>269</sup> James Blight, Janet M. Lang, Hussein Banai, Malcolm Byrne, and John Tirman, *Becoming Enemies* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2012), p. 92.

<sup>270</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 474.

<sup>271</sup> State Department, Telegram to (unclear), 'PGOI suspicions about the Shah,' date unclear (after 30 July), *DED*, Vol. 7, p. 276.

<sup>272</sup> Telegram, Laingen to Newsom, 20 September 1979, *DED*, Vol. 2, [[http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v02\\_text.pdf](http://ia700409.us.archive.org/10/items/DocumentsFromTheU.s.EspionageDen/v02_text.pdf)] (accessed 16 August 2013).

<sup>273</sup> Jordan, *Crisis*, p. 31.

<sup>274</sup> Jordan, *Crisis*, p. 27.

<sup>275</sup> Jimmy Carter, interview with the author, 30 July 2011.

doubts have emerged as to the humanitarian necessity of the admission,<sup>276</sup> a closer look at the evidence reveals that assurances are nowhere to be found. Gary Sick, William Quandt and Henry Precht have all recently confirmed this point.<sup>277</sup> In the admission decision, the Administration confirmed many of the traits that had characterised its policy towards Iran from the start: short-termism, the primacy of the Shah, the dismissal of the opposition's concerns, and a disregard for longer-term risks.

Laingen and Precht met with Iranian authorities the day before the Shah's admission to the US to communicate the decision. As if the situation was not sensitive enough, Brzezinski had made clear that the two envoys should not give the impression of asking for approval; the US needed to show decisiveness.<sup>278</sup> When Laingen related the news of the admission to Deputy Prime Minister Abbas-Amin Entezam, Yazdi and Bazargan, he stressed the humanitarian concerns, but the reaction was 'mixed,' 'generally subdued.' Entezam and Bazargan proved concerned, Yazdi started to emphasize the problem that this could create for the US in Iran. However, he suggested some measures that could have eased Iranian rage. First, he understood that Mexico was not ideal, but the Shah could have gone to Western Europe. Second, if the US decided to proceed, he suggested that treatment outside New York might have been 'marginally better.' Iranians, he warned, considered New York a centre of 'Rockefeller and Zionist influence.' Third, to reduce Iranian scepticism Iranian doctors might have visited the Shah. Fourth, the monarch should have pledged to refrain from any political

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<sup>276</sup> Both President Carter and Hamilton Jordan have suggested in Miller Center interviews that the Pahlavi supporters relied on a cunning ploy to have the Shah in New York, and that the Shah could have received the same treatment in Mexico. See Miller Center for Public Affairs, 'Interview with Jimmy Carter,' *CPP*, 19 November 1982, JCL, p. 38; and Miller Center for Public Affairs, 'Interview with Hamilton Jordan (including Landon Butler),' *CPP*, 6 November 1981, JCL.

<sup>277</sup> Sick, Interview with the author, Quandt, Interview with the author, and Henry Precht, Phone Interview with the author (25 July 2012).

<sup>278</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 475.

activity.<sup>279</sup> Regardless of the precautionary measures taken, however, Yazdi had warned Laingen that the US was opening a 'Pandora's box' and that the ensuing chaos would have been beyond his control.<sup>280</sup>

The Shah was admitted; and only the fourth condition was accepted. Chaos ensued. Demonstrations threatened the Embassy on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November.<sup>281</sup> Khomeini took advantage of the situation calling for attacks on the US and suggesting that the moderates had been discredited. On the same day, Khomeini's words seemed to receive confirmation. In Algiers, for the celebrations of Algerian independence, Brzezinski met with Yazdi and Bazargan. Although it is still unclear who invited whom, the meeting represented the final straw. Photos of handshakes and smiles between Yazdi and Brzezinski were published in all Iranian newspapers, condemning the moderates. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, the 'Muslim students followers of the Imam's line' broke into the American compound to sit-in and make a statement.<sup>282</sup> They thought they were going to stay there for two or three days. They stayed for 444, keeping US personnel hostage, changing the history of US-Iran relations, and sealing the fate of the Carter's Presidency.

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<sup>279</sup> Telegram, American Embassy Tehran to Secretary of State (to Under Sec. Newsom), 21 October 1979, *DED*, Vol. 7, pp. 281-283.

<sup>280</sup> Bowden, *Guests*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>281</sup> Letter, Laingen to Penne, 1 November 1979, *DED*, Vol. 4.

<sup>282</sup> Bowden, *Guests*, p. 28.

## 6.4 CONCLUSION

*To sum up, we gambled on the Shah,  
and for many years, our gamble paid off.  
I have no regrets on this score.<sup>283</sup>*  
Anthony Parsons.

Describing the Algiers meeting in his memoirs, Brzezinski acknowledged that the possibility of a meeting presented risks on both sides. If he refused the meeting, refusal might have been interpreted as a sign of hostility; if he accepted, conspiracy theories might have flourished.<sup>284</sup> This recognition is particularly surprising since, in its approach to Iran, the Carter Administration had consistently dismissed risks inherent in its choices.

In line with the first hypothesis set out in **Chapter 3**, the analysis of the Carter Administration's policies has suggested that uncertainty played a crucial role in the initial posture of the Administration. The Administration seemed unsure as to America's role in the world and tried to chart a new course. When it came to Iran, the Administration operated in an informational vacuum. The cuts of the 1960s and 1970s, the policies of the Nixon-Kissinger-Ford triumvirate and vested interests in Washington meant that the Administration was not only unable to gather the right answers, but also unable to ask the right questions. Developments in Iran represented an 'unknown unknown.' Beyond this background, uncertainty also played an 'active' part in the decision-making process as President Carter worried about the consequences of his own actions and about the possibility of a US intervention spiraling out of control. In particular, a Vietnam-like escalation and the uncertainty as to a possible Soviet involvement made Carter unsure about any strong commitment. Beyond the role played by uncertainty, the analysis has also stressed how decision-makers focused on the risks posed by the various decisions regarding Iran. Carter and the White House focused on the probability of 'something going wrong' and on the weakening of both the US strategic positions and the Administration's positions vis-à-vis domestic critics. In line with the second hypothesis, the chapter has

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<sup>283</sup> Parsons, *The Pride*, p. 140.

<sup>284</sup> Brzezinski, *Power*, p. 476.

identified key features of risk management in the Administration's approach to Iran including: minimalism, short-termism, the tendency to cyclically reassess the problem, and an awareness of the limited possibilities open to decision-makers. More specifically, the analysis has spelled out the trade-offs inherent in Carter's choices, identifying the risks targeted and on those dismissed.

In its first months in office, the White House, certainly influenced by the positive reports of the Ford years, sided with the Shah. In spite of some misgivings in quarters of the Administration, the White House dismissed the political, short-term risks inherent in the arms sales and ridiculed those who pointed out strategic, long-term risks. To appease the Shah and to maintain the political ties with the monarch, the White House also watered down its commitment to human rights. With this choice, the Carter dismissed short-term political risks, coming from accusations of hypocrisy, and long-term risk in ignoring the calls for help from the opposition. The Administration, admittedly replicating past practices, dismissed the risks inherent in inadequate intelligence and in the full reliance on the Shah for information as to developments in Iran. When signs of crisis started to emerge, the Administration decided to maintain a business as usual attitude, 'capitalising' on the monarch. With this choice, signs of the incoming revolution were ignored.

As the business as usual attitude became untenable, the default reply became blind support. The Administration tried to manage the target risk inherent in the failing Shah's confidence. The Shah, however, was losing control on Iran, and American behavior dismissed the long-term risks inherent in inaction. In particular, many elements within the Administration dismissed the risks inherent in the rebuffing of the opposition, of its pleas for help, and of its plans to ease the crisis. Unable to chart a long-term course, the Administration relied on short-term and unlikely measures, such as total support for Bakhtiar. The minimalism, and the illusion of neutrality, however, positioned the Administration on the side of repression. With the

final success of the Revolution, the Administration found itself paying the price of its previous rebuffing of the opposition, and of the general lack of knowledge of the new dominant forces. And yet the Administration failed to take into account the sensitivity of the Iranian situation. A 'back in business' attitude was coupled with a lack of positive signals from Washington. These policies – with 'timely' contributions from Congress - discredited the moderates in Iran and presented the Carter Administration as an enemy of the Revolution. In spite of Laingen's warnings, no positive signals arrived from Washington. The final admission of the Shah dismissed the risks for the security of the Americans in Iran, and for long-term relations with the Iranian government.

Finally, in line with the third hypothesis and in a pattern already identified in the discovery of the missiles in Cuba, the taking of the hostages and the emergence of crisis did not explode overnight. It developed as the slow accumulation of 'countervailing risks.' Presidential management (and mismanagement) of the risks involved in the Iranian issue contributed to its travel from the 'non-issue' pole, to the 'full blown crisis' one. To be sure, this chapter is not arguing that the Administration could have prevented the Iranian Revolution. Making such a point would mean erasing the Iranian side of the story. What the chapter claims is that the Administration could have been better positioned when the Revolution finally came. The policies of the Administration contributed to the alienation of the Iranian population and of the Iranian opposition. Some could argue that by the time the Administration entered office, the US Government was already overly identified with the Shah and his rule. As we have seen, however, the opposition showed until very late great hopes in the Carter Administration. As the historian Gaddis Smith suggests:

If Carter had been more critical of the Shah, conceivably, it would have been a little more difficult for the Ayatollah Khomeini to identify the United States as the Great Satan and to

say everything that is wrong in Iran is basically the fault of the United States.<sup>285</sup>

Questioned on the Carter Administration's main mistakes, Jay Hakes answered that becoming the 'best buddy' with the Shah was something that the Administration and the President should have avoided.<sup>286</sup> This chapter agrees.

**Chapter 7** will discuss a post-Cold War case study: the Clinton Administration's troubles in the Balkans. As **Chapter 2** suggested, for Beckian (and to a certain extent Foucauldian) approaches to risk in IR, with the shift to a post-Cold War environment we should witness a radical change in the nature of the foreign policy context and in the practice of foreign policy decision-making. In particular, risk should become a predominant variable, decision-makers should confront unprecedented levels of uncertainty, and short-term practices of risk-management should substitute long-term strategies. **Chapter 5** and **6** have already argued that these features defined the foreign policy decision-making context even during the Cold War. **Chapter 7** will suggest that, in spite of a change in international context, continuities can be identified in the pressures that shape Presidential decision-making and in its conduct.

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<sup>285</sup> George Gaddis Smith, PBS, *American Experience, The Presidents: Jimmy Carter*, 2006, [<http://video.pbs.org/video/1049390462/>] (accessed 18 August 2013).

<sup>286</sup> Dr. Jay Hakes, Carter Center, 'The Carter Presidency Revisited,' *Conversations at the Carter Center*, 28 October 2009, [<http://www.cartercenter.org/news/multimedia/Conversations/CarterPresidencyRevisited.html>] (accessed 18 August 2013).



## CHAPTER 7: 'WHY IS THIS HAPPENING AND WE ARE NOT DOING ANYTHING?' THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND THE RISKY ROAD TO SREBRENICA, 1992-1995

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

If one had to identify a point where the half-hearted diplomatic initiatives and hollow threats and straddling of options finally coalesced into a purposeful American policy toward the Balkans, it would be...after the fall of Srebrenica.<sup>1</sup>

The consensus is that President Clinton's record in Bosnia, before 1995, was abysmal.<sup>2</sup> Three main interpretations have been offered for the Administration's 'flapping around'<sup>3</sup> when it came to the Balkans. First, the President was uninterested in foreign policy and Bosnia was not in the US national interest.<sup>4</sup> Second, bureaucratic rivalries within the Administration stymied the decision-making process.<sup>5</sup> Third, the Administration's decisions were driven by the vagaries of media and public interest in the war.<sup>6</sup> These interpretations are all, to a certain extent valid, but not complete.<sup>7</sup> Clinton was certainly more concerned with domestic and economic issues, yet Bosnia was impossible to ignore and was the first foreign policy issue dealt with by the Administration.<sup>8</sup> For many close to Clinton, the 'uninterested President interpretation' is unconvincing. 'When I talked to him,' Robert Gallucci, former member of the G. H. W. Bush and Clinton Administrations, recalled, 'he was quite focused on Bosnia...he was always the smartest guy

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Danner, *Stripping Bare the Body* (New York: Nation Books, 2009): 128.

<sup>2</sup> John Dumbrell, 'President Bill Clinton and US Transatlantic foreign policy,' *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, Vol. 8 (2012), pp. 268-278.

<sup>3</sup> John Dumbrell, *Clinton's Foreign Policy: between the Bushes* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 86.

<sup>4</sup> James Goldgeiger, Interview with the author, 26 July 2012, Washington.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> See Steven Burg and Paul Shoup, *Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), Charles Philippe David, 'A strategy of circumvention,' *Journal of Contingencies and crisis-management*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1995), pp. 195-214.

<sup>8</sup> David, 'A strategy'.

in the room.’<sup>9</sup> The ‘bureaucratic rivalry’ interpretation is built on an excessively mechanical division between hawks and doves<sup>10</sup> and seems to forget that until late in the game voices calling for a more forceful action either resigned or were not heard.<sup>11</sup> As to the ‘CNN effect,’<sup>12</sup> on Bosnia, public interest and media coverage, especially by key newspapers and on TV, followed a similar pattern. They would peak during particularly gruesome episodes, but this interest would soon decline as the tension on the ground temporarily eased. These bouts of attention were sometimes enough to shake the Administration into a strong domestic posture, especially when accompanied by pressure coming from Congress and other political circles. Until late in the game, however, the pressure was not consistent enough for Clinton to take decisive action. Furthermore, throughout the war, US public opinion, although often pressuring to ‘do more,’ remained sceptical of any direct military intervention.<sup>13</sup>

Acknowledging these weaknesses, some authors suggested that Clinton’s main aim was to contain the Bosnia issue through a ‘strategy of circumvention.’<sup>14</sup> This ‘containment thesis’ is in line with many accounts of the Bosnia war. Memoirs of participants and analysis of US policy, in fact, seem to follow an established pattern. They deal with the Clinton campaign, and with the Administration’s early initiatives and then leave the following years relatively unexplored, simply suggesting that Clinton’s performance was poor, until the ‘Srebrenica turning point’ of 1995.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Gallucci, Skype interview with the author, 16 May 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Leon Fuerth, Interview with the author, 23 July 2012, Washington (USA).

<sup>11</sup> Marshall Harris, Interview with the author, 20 July 2012, Washington (USA); and Jim Hooper, Phone interview with the author, 25 July 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Jakobsen, ‘Focus on the CNN effect misses the point,’ *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2000), pp. 131-143.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Sobel, ‘US and European attitudes toward intervention in the former Yugoslavia,’ in Richard Ullman (Ed.), *The World and Yugoslavia’s wars* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> David, ‘A strategy.’

<sup>15</sup> See Warren Christopher, *In the stream of History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: The Modern Library, 1998), Derek Chollet, *The Road to Dayton Accords* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), Ivo. H. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*

In line with the theoretical framework developed in the thesis, the main purpose of this chapter is to look at the intervening years. **Part two** of the Chapter will set the context for the Clinton Administration's Bosnia policy. Clinton took office at a time of uncertainty for the future of the US's international role. Such uncertainty derived from the disappearance of the Soviet threat, from the emergence of new threats, and from the inability of the George H. W. Bush administration to set a new, clear purpose for US power.<sup>16</sup> The Clinton Administration inherited the issue, with no clear solution in sight. However, as Washington debated the future of US power, the Balkans exploded and President Clinton was called to face the Bosnia issue even before taking office. The more substantial section of the chapter, **Part three**, will look at the choices made by the Clinton team. As in previous chapters, these choices will be analysed in terms of risk vs. risk trade-offs. For every key decision on Bosnia, the chapter will identify the 'target risk' managed, and the 'countervailing risks' ignored or dismissed. The trade-offs will follow the Bosnia issue from the 1992 Presidential campaign, to the Clinton Administration inability to set a clear course, concluding with the escalation of violence in 1995.

## **7.2 THE NEW GAME: THE END OF THE COLD WAR AND GEORGE H. W. BUSH'S LEGACY**

### **7.2.1 A New World Order: the US and the use of force**

With US troops in the Gulf in 1991, President George H. W. Bush had struck a high moral tone suggesting that 'a New World Order,' based on peace, security and the rule of law was at stake.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the anticlimactic end of the war had left the Bush Administration with few indications of what this order

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(Washington: Brookings Institution, 2000), and Samantha Power, *'A Problem from Hell'* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> George H. W. Bush, 'State of the Union address,' 29 January 1991, [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=19253&st=&st1=#ixz1wMeMUIT5>] (accessed 19 August 2013).

entailed and, above all, of when and how US power could be used. A review of the literature suggests that three main positions can be identified within the Administration: 'hegemonists,' 'realists' or pragmatists,<sup>18</sup> and the President. For the first group, the Gulf War had been a clear demonstration of US power. The US could mould the international system according to its desires and, in order to do so, it needed to achieve unchallenged pre-eminence. As the highly contested 1992 *Defense Planning Guidance* stated, the US needed to 'prevent the re-emergence of a new rival.' The document suggested a posture of total predominance through the imposition of America's will on allies, and enemies alike, and through the maintenance of 'mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role.'<sup>19</sup> Drafted by Paul Wolfowitz, within the Department of Defense, and leaked to the *New York Times*, the document created an immediate public uproar.<sup>20</sup>

Within the Administration, such a posture had to confront 'pragmatists,' including Secretary of State James Baker and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell. For them, even the very concept of a 'new world order' was dangerous. They recognised the unprecedented possibilities open to US power, but were wary of the implications. Baker argued that in the new world, still without a name, America's leadership remained a 'necessity and not a luxury.' He added, however, that the situation confronting the US was complex and should not have been encapsulated in facile slogans.<sup>21</sup> Along the same lines, Powell understood that the real disagreement at the centre of the debate was an old one: how much is enough? Although, the complete

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<sup>18</sup> Nancy Soderberg, *The Superpower Myth* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> The New York Times, 'Excerpts From Pentagon's Plan,' 8 March 1992, [<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/excerpts-from-pentagon-s-plan-prevent-the-re-emergence-of-a-new-rival.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>] (accessed 21 August 2013).

<sup>20</sup> James Mann, *The Rise of the Vulcans* (New York: Viking, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> US House of Representatives, 'The future of U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era,' *Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 102<sup>nd</sup> Congress, February - April, 1992 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 6.

uncertainty of the post-Cold War world made this traditional problem increasingly difficult to solve,<sup>22</sup> Powell had an answer. First, US forces were in the process of being restructured according to the Base Force plan, focusing on regional contingencies instead of global war. Second, he soon refined his understating of when and how to use force in a 'doctrine.' Powell's position came from a strong personal and moral commitment to avoid the mistakes of Vietnam, above all, the lack of clear political objectives and the piecemeal build-up.<sup>23</sup>

According to several authors, beyond this division, the President demonstrated a willingness to strengthen the role of the United States on the international scene, especially through the United Nations.<sup>24</sup> On the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1992, at a Security Council meeting held at the Heads of State level, the United States played a leading role in requesting UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to examine ways to strengthen UN peacekeeping. This request led to the publication of the Secretary General's *Agenda for Peace*.<sup>25</sup> The President also launched a review within the Administration of the US' role in the organisation. Finally, in September, he declared to the UN General Assembly: 'the United States is ready to do its part to strengthen world peace by strengthening international peacekeeping.'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> House of Representatives, 'The future,' p. 368.

<sup>23</sup> Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), p. 451, and Colin Powell, 'US Forces: challenges ahead,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 5 (Winter), pp. 32-45.

<sup>24</sup> Ivo H. Daalder, 'Knowing when to say no: the development of US policy for peacekeeping,' in William Durch (Ed.), *UN Peacekeeping, American politics, and the uncivil wars of the 1990s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) and Sarah B. Sewall, 'US Policy and Practice regarding Multilateral Peace Operations,' *Carr Center for Human Rights*, Policy Working Paper 01-3 [<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/cchrp/Web%20Working%20Papers/PKO.pdf>] (accessed 26 October 2013)

<sup>25</sup> UN Secretary General, 'Agenda for peace, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping,' Report, 17 June 1992 [[http://www.unrol.org/files/A\\_47\\_277.pdf](http://www.unrol.org/files/A_47_277.pdf)] (accessed 29 October 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Daalder, 'Knowing,' in Durch (Ed.), *UN Peacekeeping*, p. 37.

World developments in the meanwhile seemed to support the President's view and the need for a strong UN. In Somalia, famine and warlords had created a humanitarian tragedy. The end of the review of the US policy towards the UN coincided precisely with this crisis. The Administration intervened, pursuant to a UN Security Council resolution approved under Chapter VII, for either purely humanitarian,<sup>27</sup> or political and humanitarian purposes.<sup>28</sup> Still, according to Ivo Daalder, Powell and Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney made sure that Operation Restore Hope, which included US troops on the ground, would not act as a blueprint for future adventurism.<sup>29</sup> Both the *National Security Strategy* of 1993 and the National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 74 (the outcome of the policy review) remained vague as to the real nature of US commitment to the UN. The directive stated that the US would help in strengthening UN peacekeeping, also urging other nations to contribute.<sup>30</sup> The document, however, also stressed that the US contribution would be limited US participation to situations in which the 'unique' capabilities of the American military were necessary.<sup>31</sup>

The Administration's oscillating behaviour as to the use of American power reflected the broader uncertainty regarding the US' role in the post-Cold War world. In academia, scholars debated the shape of the future. Some argued that the UN Security Council, liberated by the Cold War stalemate, was now free to become a key actor on the international scene.<sup>32</sup> Madeleine Albright, at the time still at Georgetown University, agreed, calling for a new international community.<sup>33</sup> Others demonstrated only contempt for

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Gallucci, Phone interview with the author, 16 May 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Brands, *From Berlin* and David Gibbs, *First do no harm* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), p. 135.

<sup>29</sup> Daalder, 'Knowing,' in Durch (Ed.), *UN Peacekeeping*, pp. 37-39.

<sup>30</sup> George H. W. Bush, 'National Security Directive 74,' 24 November 1992, [<http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/nsd/nsd74.pdf>] (accessed 19 August 2013), p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Sewall, 'US Policy,' p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Russett and James Sutterlin, 'The UN in a New World Order,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (Spring 1991), p. 82.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Dobbs, *Madeleine Albright: a Twentieth Century Odyssey* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), p. 350.

multilateralism. Charles Krauthammer famously argued that the US was 'embarrassed' of its power and still 'worshipped at the shrine of collective security.' The US was the only uncontested superpower and should have behaved like one.<sup>34</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan's hawkish former Ambassador to the UN, argued that the US should give up the responsibilities of a superpower and turn into a 'normal power' for normal times.<sup>35</sup> Equally, Nathan Glazer argued that it was time to return to the modest role the Founding Fathers had envisaged.<sup>36</sup> This isolationist impetus had even more vociferous supporters among 'paleoconservatives,'<sup>37</sup> such as Pat Buchanan who called for an American retreat with no more foreign entanglements.<sup>38</sup> Others were concerned by American retrenchment. William Hyland suggested that with the end of ideologies, it was time for pragmatism and compromises.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, historian John Lewis Gaddis identified the need to find a balance between new forces of integration and fragmentation.<sup>40</sup> Strobe Talbott, future member of the Clinton Administration, warned that, in spite of the Cold War victory, the 'disreputable' grip of isolationism threatened future developments.<sup>41</sup> The same mixture of euphoria and uncertainty characterised Francis Fukuyama's essay 'Have we reached the end of history?'<sup>42</sup> which soon turned into an international best-seller.

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar moment,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (1990/1991), pp. 23-33.

<sup>35</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, 'A normal country for normal times,' *The National Interest*, Vol. 21 (Fall 1990), pp. 40-45

<sup>36</sup> Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> Brands, *From Berlin*, p. 78.

<sup>38</sup> Patrick Buchanan, 'America First—and Second, and Third,' *The National Interest*, No. 19, (Spring 1990), pp. 77-82.

<sup>39</sup> William Hyland, 'The case for pragmatism,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (1992), pp. 44-45.

<sup>40</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, 'Toward the post-Cold War world,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (Spring 1991), pp. 102-122.

<sup>41</sup> Strobe Talbott, 'Post-victory Blues,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (1992), p. 53.

<sup>42</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'The end of history?' *The National Interest*, No. 16 (Summer 1989), and Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

In this uncertainty, the shape of things to come assumed two main characteristics: the future would be uncertain, and frightening. The National Military Strategy signalled the defeat of Communism and the unlikelihood of global war, but warned against future threats inherent in the 'uncertainty and instability of a rapidly changing world.'<sup>43</sup> As we have seen in **Chapter 2**, NATO contributed to the sense of uncertainty surrounding the post-Cold War world, and to a nostalgic outlook for its bipolar predecessor.<sup>44</sup> In the new 'game' of the post-Cold War world, as Madeleine Albright would later write, 'there were far more than two teams; the uniforms were mixed while the scoreboard had gone haywire. And all the spectators – civil society – had come pouring down onto the field.'<sup>45</sup> On a similar note, Robert Gates, Director of the Central Intelligence, admitted:

All historical experience suggests to us that, while the revolutionary upheavals we have seen...have succeeded in breaking us loose from the past, the final shape of the future is far from established.<sup>46</sup>

In a memo to the President, during the last days of the Administration, Acting Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger concluded that complexity would be the main feature of the future:

The international system is tilting schizophrenically toward greater fragmentation...the resulting chaos is enough to almost – almost – make one nostalgic for the familiar discipline and order of the Cold War.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> US Government, *National Military Strategy of the United States*, January 1992, [<http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA338837>] (accessed 19 August 2013), p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> NATO, 'The Alliance Strategic Concept, 1991,' [[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_23847.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23847.htm)] (accessed 19 August 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Madeleine Albright, *Madame Secretary* (New York: MacMillan, 2003), p. 139.

<sup>46</sup> US House of Representatives, 'The future,' p. 214.

<sup>47</sup> Derek Chollet and James Goldgeiger, *America between the Wars* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), p. 49.



No conclusion could have been more distant from the hopes of a New World Order.

### **7.2.2 The Bush Administration and Yugoslavia: 'We don't have a dog in this fight'**

While the world and the US were focused on the complexity and unpredictability of the new post-Cold War world, Yugoslavia disintegrated. In the autumn of 1990, in an estimate quickly leaked to *The New York Times*, the CIA had warned that Yugoslavia would have ceased to function within a year, and that civil war would have been likely, although not before 1992.<sup>48</sup> With the end of the Cold War, Yugoslavia had lost both its strategic value (as defence against a Soviet incursion in Europe through the so called Ljubljana Gap) and its ideological appeal as challenge to the Soviet brand of communism.<sup>49</sup> These developments coincided with economic crisis and ensuing austerity measures, and with the re-birth of nationalism, which often turned economic and social issues into ethnic and national ones.<sup>50</sup> More problematically, developments in Yugoslavia were erroneously interpreted as processes connected with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The confirmation of the Communist Party's rule in Serbia led to an interpretation of the war as a last effort by communist leaders to remain in power. The possibility of a war along ethnic lines initially baffled the international community and the United States.<sup>51</sup>

In the spring and summer of 1991, European and American efforts remained focused on the preservation of the Yugoslav Federation,<sup>52</sup> in the

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<sup>48</sup> Warren Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe* (New York: Times Books, 1999), p. 84.

<sup>49</sup> James Gow, *Triumph of the lack of will* (London: Hurst and Company, 1997), p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> See Susan Woodward, *Balkan tragedy* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> See James A. Baker III with Thomas DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> According to several authors, the US coupled a 'unity and democracy' position with a lack of support for the government of the last Yugoslav

hope that the Federation would not act as a dangerous precedent of violent dissolution. As late as the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, during a visit in Belgrade, Secretary of State James Baker made clear that the US would not recognise unilateral secession.<sup>53</sup> The European Community (EC) tried to take the lead in negotiating efforts to keep the Federation together. Four days after Baker's visit, though Slovenia and Croatia declared independence. As US Ambassador to Yugoslavia Warren Zimmermann suggested, Baker's failure in delaying secession had 'cooled whatever ardour the Secretary of State may have had for propelling the United States into the deepening crisis.'<sup>54</sup>

When war broke out in Slovenia, Europe maintained a 'glowing enthusiasm' for its possibilities of solving the crisis.<sup>55</sup> The war in Slovenia lasted barely ten days, from the 26<sup>th</sup> of June to the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1991. The 'Brioni Agreement,' mediated by the EC, brought the war to a close. The agreement, hailed as a 'triumph' of diplomacy left most crucial issues unresolved,<sup>56</sup> including the future of Croatia.<sup>57</sup> More problematically, the agreement was

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Prime Minister Ante Markovic. Markovic made clear (also in visits to Washington) that his main aim was debt relief. The US however did not help Markovic government for three main reasons: Yugoslavia's loss of importance, the understanding in Washington of Markovic's slim chances of success, and violations of human rights (such as those against Albanians in Kosovo) on which, during the Cold War, the US had turned a blind eye. With the decline of Markovic's position, power shifted increasingly to the Republics. See Zimmermann, *Origins*, pp. 44-50, David Gompert, 'The United States and the Yugoslav War,' in Ullman (Ed.), *The world and Yugoslavia's war*, p. 123, Gibbs, *First*, pp. 71-75.

<sup>53</sup> Baker, *The Politics*, p. 482.

<sup>54</sup> Zimmermann, *Origins*, p. 164.

<sup>55</sup> Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD), 'Srebrenica a "safe area" – Part 1,' 2002, p. 286

[<http://www.srebrenica.nl/Pages/OOR/23/379.bGFuZz1OTA.html>] (accessed 19 August 2013), p. 20

<sup>56</sup> Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 166.

<sup>57</sup> Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 99-100.

perfectly in line with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's willingness to let Slovenia go, due to a lack of Serb minorities and interests there.<sup>58</sup>

The agreement, however, maintained Europe's hopes that it could take the lead in solving the Yugoslav crisis. The war in Croatia, more violent and protracted, started at the end of July 1991, and soon made clear Europe's inability to broker a cease-fire. The Hague Conference organised by the EC was an attempt to achieve a general settlement for the whole Yugoslavia. The settlement, the Carrington Plan,<sup>59</sup> was initially supported and later rejected by Milosevic.<sup>60</sup> The violence in Eastern Croatia and in town such as Vukovar reached almost unprecedented peaks. During these developments, the US largely stood by, in spite of calls for action from many quarters including Croatia's President Franjo Tudjman<sup>61</sup> and part of the media.<sup>62</sup> To be sure, the Bush Administration was, at the time, involved in several crucial developments including: the coup against Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the management of the Soviet nuclear stockpile, and the Middle East peace process. In this context, the Administration overlooked the threat posed by Milosevic.<sup>63</sup> The US attitude was summed up in Secretary of State Baker's famous sentence: 'We don't have a dog in this fight.'<sup>64</sup> With Europe unable to end the fighting

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<sup>58</sup> Jan Willem Honig and Norbert Both, *Srebrenica: record of a War crime* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 71.

<sup>59</sup> From the name of the EC negotiator Lord Peter Carrington.

<sup>60</sup> Milosevic had allegedly accepted an oral agreement that included the independence of Croatia and the preservation of Croatian Serbs' human rights. When the plan was presented in written form, however, it entailed the independence of all Republics in Yugoslavia, not only Croatia. Something Milosevic could not accept. He could not let Bosnia go. See BBC, 'The Death of Yugoslavia,' BBC Documentary, 1995, Part 3 'Wars of Independence,' Min. 36-38 [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMyQsTLSVeI>] (accessed 28 October 2013).

<sup>61</sup> Jane M. O. Sharp, 'Dayton report card,' *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Winter), p. 101.

<sup>62</sup> The New York Times, 'Serbia vs. the New World Order,' 14 August 1991, [<http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/14/opinion/serbia-vs-the-new-world-order.html>] (accessed 29 October 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Baker, *The Politics*, p. 636.

<sup>64</sup> Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 30.

alone, and with deep division within the EC regarding the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia, the issue moved to the UN.<sup>65</sup> The war in Croatia would officially end with the declaration of a UN ceasefire, brokered by former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 1992. Military operations would continue until 1995.<sup>66</sup> The attention soon shifted to Bosnia.

After a referendum, required by the EC and boycotted by the Bosnia Serbs, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic announced the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1992. Even before the referendum, Europe had started to work on a plan that could prevent conflict. Talks started on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February in Lisbon, under the Portuguese Presidency of the EC. The end result, the Carrington-Cutilheiro Plan, was presented in March 1992 and included a new constitutional arrangement for Bosnia. According to the plan, the country would have been divided into ethnically based units, or 'cantons' - as they were publicly known, although the term was never used in EC talks - with ethnically-based power-sharing at all levels of government. The plan was certainly not perfect and disagreement still surrounds the plan's fairness and chances of success.<sup>67</sup> All parties signed the plan on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, but ten days later President Izetbegovic withdrew his signature. To this day it is unclear to what extent the US government, through Zimmermann, influenced the Bosnian Muslims' rejection of the

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<sup>65</sup> Germany pushed for recognition whereas France and Britain counselled restraint. William J. Durch and James A. Schaer, 'Faultlines: UN Operations in the Former Yugoslavia,' in Durch (Ed.), *UN Peacekeeping*, p. 205.

<sup>66</sup> For an account of the wars in Slovenia and Croatia look (among many other sources) at: BBC, 'The Death of Yugoslavia,' *BBC Documentary*, 1995, Parts 1-3 [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oODjsdLoSYo>] (accessed 19 August 2013), Lenard Cohen, *Broken Bonds* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), David Owen, *Balkan Odyssey* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1995), Gow, *Triumph*, and Silber and Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*. For the Bush Administration's role: Zimmermann, *Origins*, and David Gompert, 'How to defeat Serbia,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (July/August 1994), pp. 30-47.

<sup>67</sup> See Ed Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 120 and James Gow, *Triumph*, p. 81 for a negative view. NIOD, 'Part 1' for a positive one.

plan. A Dutch government report concluded that it is not 'unimaginable' that the US might have played a strong role in Izetbegovic's decision.<sup>68</sup> Others have suggested that the Bosnian Muslims themselves were behind the decision, not so much President Izetbegovic, but the radicals within his party (the SDA); a 'grey eminence' that would make its presence felt throughout the war.<sup>69</sup>

With Izetbegovic's refusal of the plan and with the recognition of Bosnia by the EC (on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April) and by the US (on the 7<sup>th</sup>) tension quickly increased. On the same day of US recognition, the Bosnian Serbs declared the independence of their own republic, with capital in Pale. War ensued with the level of violence turning extremely high. The UN, with resolution 713 on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1991, had imposed an arms embargo on the whole Yugoslavia, after a request by the Yugoslav government at the time. The embargo now left the newly created Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina at a disadvantage. Furthermore, in May, Resolution 752 called for the withdrawal of the JNA from Bosnia. Serbia responded with the creation of a new Federation based on Serbia and Montenegro, and splitting the army. This move largely represented a scam. Most of the JNA troops and materiel remained in Bosnia and assumed the colours of the new Bosnian Serb Army. The UN imposed economic sanctions on Serbia and Montenegro and on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June expanded UNPROFOR's<sup>70</sup> mandate to secure the Sarajevo airport. The Bush Administration, which had been involved in the Bosnia issue from the start, went along with the UN resolutions and with international efforts at mediation. As the tension and violence increased, however, the Administration came under increasing pressure to do more. Among those

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<sup>68</sup> NIOD, 'Part 1,' p. 287.

<sup>69</sup> Burg and Shoup, *Ethnic Conflict*, p. 194, and Susan Woodward, Interview with the author, 16 July 2012, New York.

<sup>70</sup> The establishment of a UN mission for Yugoslavia had been suggested in Resolution 721, of the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1991. UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force), the UN mission to keep peace in Croatia, was eventually established with Resolution 743 on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 1992. For the text of the various UN Security Council Resolutions regarding the Balkans see [<http://www.nato.int/ifor/un/home.htm>] (accessed 26 October 2013).

pressuring was Bill Clinton, Governor of Arkansas, and Democratic Presidential candidate for the 1992 elections.

### **7.3 CLINTON AND BOSNIA: A CANDIDATE'S FREEBIE, A PRESIDENT'S NIGHTMARE**

#### **7.3.1 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 1: a candidate's cheap shot vs. a President's responsibility**

In the summer of 1992, Bush's caution seemed to become increasingly untenable, but the Administration maintained its focus on a narrow understanding of national interest. As NSA Brent Scowcroft would later recall:

We could never satisfy ourselves that the amount of involvement we thought it would take was justified in terms of the US interests involved.<sup>71</sup>

Soon, this position started to appear unjustifiable. Amid public and media outrage, the presence of detention camps in Bosnia - active since May - was revealed and, even more worrisome, the Administration seemed to have been involved in a cover-up of information.<sup>72</sup> Bush immediately reacted: 'we will not rest', he stated, 'until the international community has gained access to any and all detentions camps.'<sup>73</sup> But with no indications of how that could be done, the reaction sounded unconvincing.

Democrats in Congress, including Senator Sam Nunn (D-GE) took notice of the Administration's unwillingness to use force and of its fear of getting

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<sup>71</sup> Power, *'A Problem'*, p. 288.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Danner, 'While America Watched,' *ABC Documentary*, 30 March 1994, Transcript [[http://www.markdanner.com/articles/show/while\\_america\\_watched\\_the\\_bosnia\\_tragedy](http://www.markdanner.com/articles/show/while_america_watched_the_bosnia_tragedy)] (accessed 21 September 2013). Unless other sources are mentioned, this and other Mark Danner's articles are taken from the author's website. When page numbers are mentioned, they refer to the PDFs available on the website [<http://www.markdanner.com>] (accessed 21 September 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Power, *'A Problem'*, pp. 274-275

bogged down.<sup>74</sup> Confirming the point, Lt. Gen. Barry McCaffrey, Assistant to Powell, warned that sending troops to Bosnia would have been doable, but the costs would have been massive.<sup>75</sup> This reply confirmed a pattern, common in Powell's JCS, to raise the costs of intervention to politically untenable levels.<sup>76</sup> Powell also replied angrily to the 'so-called experts' calling for airstrikes.<sup>77</sup> Powell's attitude disturbed many in Washington, including Les Aspin, Democratic congressman from Wisconsin and, crucially, future Secretary of Defense. He contested the Pentagon's 'all or nothing' attitude and accused it of sending the signal that ethnic cleansing could go unpunished.<sup>78</sup> Several State Department officials resigned to protest the Administration's 'guilt on both sides' interpretation of the war.<sup>79</sup> Washington heavyweights also made their voices heard. After a personal visit to Bosnia, Richard Holbrooke appeared on several TV shows and provocatively asked in the pages of *Newsweek* what the West's reaction would have been if Jews or Christians were being killed instead of Muslims.<sup>80</sup> Holbrooke added suggestions for a stronger American policy, including lifting the arms embargo on Bosnia.<sup>81</sup> Holbrooke was not alone.

From the beginning of the Bosnian war, Democratic Presidential candidate Bill Clinton had built on Bush's passivity to corner his opponent. To be sure, the Clinton campaign had been mainly focused on the domestic side as the famous slogan 'It's the economy stupid!' demonstrated. However, too narrow

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<sup>74</sup> US Senate, 'Situation in Bosnia and appropriate U.S. and Western responses', *Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services*, United States Senate, 102<sup>nd</sup> Congress, August 11, 1992 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 2,

<sup>75</sup> US Senate, 'Situation in Bosnia,' August 1992, pp. 7, 13, 18, 27.

<sup>76</sup> Power, *'A Problem'*, p. 283.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Gordon, 'Powell Delivers a Resounding No On Using Limited Force in Bosnia,' *The New York Times*, 28 September 1992 [<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/09/28/world/powell-delivers-a-resounding-no-on-using-limited-force-in-bosnia.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>] (accessed 19 August 2013).

<sup>78</sup> Gordon, 'Powell delivers.'

<sup>79</sup> Power, *'A Problem'*, p. 268.

<sup>80</sup> Power, *'A Problem'*, p. 280.

<sup>81</sup> Holbrooke, *To End*, p. 38.

a focus on domestic issues posed risks. After Clinton's acceptance speech for the Democratic nomination, Leslie Gelb had criticised the nominee in the *New York Times*, noting that out of 4250 words in Clinton's speech, only 141 had been devoted to foreign policy. The candidate, Gelb wrote, was convinced that the topic did not interest the American public and that it was better to stay away from it. But, he continued, Clinton was wrong on both counts, Americans always 'treated foreign policy as a metaphor for leadership,' and wanted a 'taste' of the Commander in Chief Clinton would be.<sup>82</sup> Anthony Lake, a leading figure in Clinton's campaign team and future National Security Advisor, had reached a similar conclusion. Lake had warned Clinton that to be President he needed to pass a 'voting booth' test. 'In the mysterious process that took place in the voting booth,' he had told the candidate, 'there would be a moment when voters considered how the candidate might behave during an international crisis.'<sup>83</sup> To pass that test, Clinton had positioned himself from the start as a bolder, more proactive candidate than Bush. First among his criticisms was the accusation that Bush's foreign policy in Yugoslavia ran against the American spirit; it mirrored his 'indifference' to Tiananmen, and his 'cuddling of dictators' such as Saddam.<sup>84</sup>

On Bosnia, Clinton's team debated what position the candidate should take. Having explicitly considered the risks involved in a mild position, and those involved in a strong one, Clinton's advisers suggested the candidate to use the strongest possible language against the Serbs, as a way to 'show leadership.'<sup>85</sup> When Serbs encroached on humanitarian convoys, Clinton went on the record with a bold position suggesting that the US should have

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<sup>82</sup> Leslie Gelb, 'A mere 141 words,' *The New York Times*, 19 July 1992 [<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/07/19/opinion/foreign-affairs-a-mere-141-words.html?src=pm>] (accessed 19 August 2013).

<sup>83</sup> David Halberstam, *War in a time of peace* (New York: Scribner, 2001), p. 22.

<sup>84</sup> Drew, *On the Edge*, p. 138.

<sup>85</sup> L. Blumenfeld, Memorandum to Anthony Lake, 12 June (1992), Box 10, Clinton Administration, Folder 6, *Clinton Campaign Files*, Bosnia and Herzegovina, June 1992, Anthony Lake Papers (ALP), Library of Congress (LoC), Washington.



taken the lead in seeking the UN Security Council's approval for air strikes, and in tightening sanctions on the 'renegade regime' of Slobodan Milosevic.<sup>86</sup> Such rhetoric represented a radical departure from Bush's portrayal of the conflict as a civil war with atrocities on both sides. As events, including the discovery of the detention camps, seemed to confirm his interpretation, Clinton charged again suggesting the use of air power to 'restore the basic conditions of humanity.' The White House tried to react. Marlin Fitzwater, White House spokesperson attacked Clinton. The candidate, he said, was using 'the kind of reckless approach that indicates he better do more homework on foreign policy.' 'It's clear,' he added, 'he's unaware of the political complications in Yugoslavia.' In the short-term, however, Clinton's position put him on the right side of the debate. As Mark Danner wrote,

It was equally clear that Clinton was aware of the political implications in America. The Arkansas governor had found the perfect opening to attack the 'foreign policy President' for inaction in the face of a moral drama that voters saw enacted each evening on their television screens.<sup>87</sup>

Holbrooke supported Clinton. In a memo to the candidate, he wrote that the few actions taken by the Bush Administration, such as supporting UN resolutions requiring unobstructed delivery of aid and access to the camps, had been taken largely due to Clinton's pressure. Contesting Bush's interpretation of the war, Holbrooke added:

This is not a choice between Vietnam and doing nothing...There are many actions that might be done now...Doing nothing now risks a far greater and more costly involvement later.

In praising Clinton's activism, he also warned of future risks. The signals given in the campaign have been 'interpreted as a sign that if elected, you

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<sup>86</sup> Owen, *Balkan*, p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Mark Danner, 'Clinton, the UN and the Bosnia disaster,' *The New York Review of Books*, 18 December 1997 [<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1997/dec/18/clinton-the-un-and-the-bosnian-disaster/?pagination=false>] (accessed 19 August 2013).

will follow a more vigorous policy.’<sup>88</sup> This was the main problem for Clinton. In managing the short-term political risks of the ‘voting booth’ test, and in his effort to ‘show leadership,’ he was dangerously overlooking future risks. In the long-term, Clinton’s highly moral stand and his call for action presented both political and strategic risks. Some on the campaign trail disagreed with the candidate’s posture. As an official working on the campaign later admitted:

I said, ‘Don’t make this commitment that you’re never going to keep’. But Tony Lake...was completely wrapped up in the moral righteousness of this idea, and he had no idea of what it would take to move the country to do this.<sup>89</sup>

Domestically, Clinton would end up cornered by his own campaign promises. Even without calls for action from the public, accusations of inconsistency would certainly pour on the Administration. At the international level, the promises made on the campaign trail affected the conduct of the war. As Haris Silajdzic, Bosnian Foreign Minister, would later recall, Clinton’s words were an ‘encouragement because in the midst of this tragedy...we needed someone by our side.’<sup>90</sup> The main hope was that Clinton had something better to offer. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

### **7.3.2 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 2: rhetoric vs. action**

#### *7.3.2.1 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 2a: the risks of Office vs. taking time*

As the Administration took office, it had to confront three main issues. First, in spite of a campaign largely focused on domestic issues, the Administration was troubled early on by an inheritance of foreign policy crises. These included Bosnia, Haiti and Somalia. As George Stephanopoulos, White House Press Secretary, later recalled:

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<sup>88</sup> Holbrooke, *To End*, p. 42.

<sup>89</sup> Mark Danner, ‘Operation Storm,’ *The New York Review of Books*, 22 October 1998

[<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1998/oct/22/operation-storm/?pagination=false>] (accessed 25 September 2013).

<sup>90</sup> Danner, ‘While America.’

It's funny, ours was a campaign that had put out comparatively few statements on foreign policy. Then we came in the White House and almost immediately we were hit with foreign policy problems.<sup>91</sup>

The second issue related heavily to the 'few statements' the Administration had put out. 'Winning the White House,' Stephanopoulos concluded, 'had added retroactive weight to everything we had said before.'<sup>92</sup> Clinton had to face the trade-offs between domestic priorities and foreign policy claims. This problem hit particularly hard in the first months when the new Clinton people, in spite of not being novices, had some natural troubles in running the interagency process.<sup>93</sup> The overarching concern in the first months in Office, however, was the same problem that had characterised the final years of the Bush Administration. It remained unclear what role the US should have played in the new post-Cold War world. 'Essentially,' Nancy Soderberg admitted, 'we had as a central question to define the role of the use of force in the post-Cold War era.'<sup>94</sup>

This, to be sure, was not, at least initially, President Clinton's main concern. In spite of his success in the 'voting booth test,' Clinton had been largely elected on a domestic platform, as demonstrated by the selection of foreign policy personnel. The two leading figures were Secretary of State Warren Christopher and National Security Advisor, Anthony Lake. Christopher was a 'safe-call.' Although his level of expertise was undisputed, the trouble was that he seemed 'a capable and highly competent bureaucrat, but probably a limited one, a man lacking originality and beliefs of his own.'<sup>95</sup>; a 'tortoise-like' figure.<sup>96</sup> But this was exactly what Clinton wanted: someone who would not be tempted to take major initiatives. Equally Lake had decided to work

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<sup>91</sup> David Rothkopf, *Running the World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), p. 319.

<sup>92</sup> Chollet and Goldgeiger, *America*, p. 59.

<sup>93</sup> Gallucci, Interview with the author.

<sup>94</sup> Rothkopf, *Running*, p. 325.

<sup>95</sup> Dumbrell, *Clinton*, p. 174.

<sup>96</sup> Lexington, 'The Tortoise at Foggy Bottom,' *The Economist*, 8 January 1994; p. 44.

behind the scenes, to avoid the rivalries of the Carter years.<sup>97</sup> This effort was successful only on the surface.

Powell, whose term was due to expire months after the start of Clinton's tenure, had a hard time getting along with the informal and disorganised Secretary of Defense Les Aspin.<sup>98</sup> As we have seen, Aspin had argued many times against Powell.<sup>99</sup> On Bosnia, some strong, moralistic and interventionist voices were present in the NSC. Vice-President Al Gore, who had a long-term commitment to Bosnia,<sup>100</sup> and UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright argued for action against the Serbs. Albright had been given an unprecedented seat in the Cabinet, but felt that her position was weakened by a small Washington-based staff and by the need to report to both the President and the Secretary of State, who were certainly more cautious on Bosnia.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the opposition of the military was difficult to ignore.<sup>102</sup> The rivalry would famously explode in one of the first meetings on Bosnia when a frustrated Albright asked Powell: 'What's the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?' As Powell wrote, the implication that US troops were toy-soldiers to move around freely, almost caused him an aneurysm.<sup>103</sup> Eruptions like this were a rarity. Powell was too towering a figure, at least initially.<sup>104</sup> And the General, although trying to 'blend in the new team,' did little to hide his contempt for the amateurish discussions of the new Administration.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, the Administration's initial indecisiveness reflected the absence of a 'team captain.'<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ivo H. Daalder and Mac I. Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), p. 215.

<sup>98</sup> Powell, *My American*, p. 563.

<sup>99</sup> Brands, *From Berlin*, p. 110.

<sup>100</sup> Fuerth, Interview with the author.

<sup>101</sup> Albright, *Madame*: 165-166.

<sup>102</sup> Gallucci, Interview with the author.

<sup>103</sup> Powell, *My American*, p. 576.

<sup>104</sup> Albright, *Madame*: 181.

<sup>105</sup> Powell, *My American*, p. 575.

<sup>106</sup> Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow*, p. 216.

Clinton, the 'captain,' was not absent or uninterested in foreign policy.<sup>107</sup> He was simply confronting the risks that the move from candidate to President implied. He was strongly concerned with what could go wrong in his first months as President. First, he was far too aware that he had been elected on a domestic platform and that the public, in spite of occasional uproars, was more focused on domestic and economic concerns. The interest in an intervention in Bosnia had plummeted, after the peak due to the discovery of the camps. Even the possibility of helping a weak nation in need failed to raise enthusiasm.<sup>108</sup> And Clinton, certainly, did not lack domestic issues to focus on, including his plans for economic recovery, health care, and the approval of NAFTA in the Senate. He understood that the risks posed by foreign entanglements, threatened his domestic agenda:

An entanglement that turned messy (as Powell repeatedly asserted would happen in Bosnia) would expose the President to early criticism from a constituency that wanted primary attention to focus on internal concerns, depleting his political capital just as he advanced a number of domestic initiatives.<sup>109</sup>

Second, Clinton was in no position to challenge the military. The relationship had not started on high notes. Powell had warned Clinton not to make the 'gays in the military' issue - a key pledge of Clinton's campaign - his 'first horse out of the gate with the armed forces.'<sup>110</sup> Clinton had not listened and the debate was now raging. Part of the military, despite Powell's silence on the issue, also criticised Clinton for having dodged the Vietnam draft, and for not being able to offer a decent Presidential military salute.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Gallucci, Interview with the author.

<sup>108</sup> Wayne Bert, *The Reluctant Superpower: the United States' Policy in Bosnia, 1991-95* (London: MacMillan, 1997), p. 82.

<sup>109</sup> Brands, *From Berlin*, p. 117.

<sup>110</sup> Powell, *My American*, p. 564.

<sup>111</sup> It took Ronald Reagan to teach Clinton how to do that. Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, 'Secrets of the Presidents Club: How Bill Clinton Learned to Salute,' *Time*, 17 April 2012, [<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2112249,00.html#ixzz1wkHB9IJW>] (accessed 19 August 2013).

With the President focused on domestic politics, the NSC staff tasked with keeping quiet on foreign policy, and with key rivalries ready to boil over, the Administration went for the safest course on Bosnia. Anthony Lake, who had been a strong voice in the campaign, now retreated. He acknowledged that the easy promises of the campaign were tough to maintain, and he suggested an early, comprehensive re-evaluation in the hope of toning down the debate.<sup>112</sup> The President called for a bottom-up review of the Administration posture on Bosnia in Presidential Review Directive 1. However, having turned the heat up on Bosnia during the campaign, the Administration now risked being burnt by it. Clinton understood that he could not retreat completely from the issue. 'If the United States doesn't act in situations like this,' he warned, 'nothing will happen.'<sup>113</sup> The decision, in spite of being the safest course domestically, was strategically dangerous. The problem with the President's interpretation was two-fold. First, a complete review starting from scratch would take time, at a moment when a sense of urgency was needed. Second, while the Administration was reviewing its options, and although American leadership was badly needed, something was happening: a peace plan was not far from being signed.

#### *7.3.2.2 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 2b: domestic political risks vs. ditching the VOPP*

UN envoy Cyrus Vance and EC envoy David Owen, co-chairs of the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia (ICFY) drafted the plan. The Vance-Owen Peace Plan included: a set of constitutional principles, a military paper, a map of the new Bosnia, and several annexes on interim agreements. Bosnia would be divided into ten provinces, with substantial autonomy, but no international legal character to prevent international unions with neighbouring countries. Strong human rights provisions would be enshrined

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<sup>112</sup> Jason DeParter, 'The man inside Bill Clinton's foreign policy,' *The New York Times*, 20 August 1995  
[<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/20/magazine/the-man-inside-bill-clinton-s-foreign-policy.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>] (accessed 19 August 2013).

<sup>113</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 9.

in the constitution, with a primary role for international experts. The map constituted an admittedly complex mosaic of provinces. The provinces were allocated a majority rule by the predominant ethnic group, but there would be no ethnically pure province. As Owen argued, three key messages emerged from the plan. First, no province was labelled 'Serb, Croat or Muslim,' to avoid the accusations of 'cantonisation' that had condemned the Carrington-Cutilheiro plan. Second, since the allocation of the provinces was based on the 1991 census, that is, before the war, the plan aimed at redressing 'ethnic cleansing.' Third, the plan allocated only 43% of Bosnia's land to the Bosnian Serbs. The allocation implied a massive retreat for the Serbs who at the time controlled 70%,<sup>114</sup> and, living in rural communities, had traditionally controlled between 50 and 60%.<sup>115</sup>

Opinions on the merits of the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP) are still radically different.<sup>116</sup> The Clinton team was from the start unconvinced. On the first day of the Administration, the State Department spokesman remarked that the Secretary: 'had expressed doubts' about whether a peace accord could 'realistically be achieved.'<sup>117</sup> Clinton would later write in his memoirs that the boundaries envisaged in the Plan seemed extremely hard to defend and could invite Serb aggression.<sup>118</sup> Beyond technical problems, however, the Administration was cornered. According to Susan Woodward, Richard Holbrooke had convinced Clinton that the plan represented appeasement.<sup>119</sup> Bosnian President Izetbegovic confirmed the same accusation in an interview reproduced by the media.<sup>120</sup> Members of the Administration argued that it condoned aggression.<sup>121</sup> Madeleine Albright

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<sup>114</sup> Owen, *Balkan*: 90-91.

<sup>115</sup> David Owen, 'The future of the Balkans,' *Foreign affairs*, 72, No. 2 (Spring 1993), p. 3.

<sup>116</sup> Owen, *Balkan*, and Burg and Shoup, *Ethnic*. Susan Woodward recently argued that the plan might have worked. Woodward, Interview with the author.

<sup>117</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 11.

<sup>118</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life* (London: Arrow Books, 2005), p. 511.

<sup>119</sup> Woodward, Interview with the author.

<sup>120</sup> Owen, *Balkan*, p. 94

<sup>121</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 11.

told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the US should have pressed the allies to do something.<sup>122</sup> As Leon Fuerth, foreign policy advisor to Al Gore, remarked, the plan:

Was presented to us as an accomplished fact, "Sign here". And they were not too pleased when we said this is not consistent with our views of how things should develop.<sup>123</sup>

During the campaign and in the first days in office, Clinton had changed the rhetoric surrounding the Bosnia war. Now, he could not appear weak towards the Serbs. If the plan was publicly understood - whether rightly or wrongly - as condoning aggression, the Administration could not accept it. Appearing strong domestically entailed strategic risks. US reluctance to back the plan strained relations with the European allies and with Russia, which had supported the ICFY from the start.<sup>124</sup> As with the campaign pledges, the impact on Bosnia was dramatic. Izetbegovic and other leading Bosnian figures came away from their first meeting with the Clinton people 'under the impression that a military intervention was imminent.'<sup>125</sup> In negotiations in Geneva in late January, Izetbegovic and Silajdzic, confident in American help, 'seemed to avoid opportunities to come to agreement.'<sup>126</sup> The situation did not change after a meeting between Christopher and the two ICFY co-chairmen on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February. Far from that, the meeting left Owen 'dismayed' by Christopher's limited understanding of the plan and of its human rights provisions, designed precisely to reverse conquest and ethnic cleansing. Christopher commended the VOPP in private talks, but did not express any support in remarks with the press.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Owen, *Balkan*, p. 101.

<sup>123</sup> Fuerth, Interview with the author.

<sup>124</sup> Owen, *Balkans*, p. 102.

<sup>125</sup> Gibbs, *First do no harm*, p. 146

<sup>126</sup> Burg and Shoup, *Ethnic*, p. 234.

<sup>127</sup> David Owen, 'Report of Lord Owen meeting with Secretary of State Christopher,' 1 February 1993, *Lord David Owen Papers*, [<http://liv.ac.uk/library/sca/owen/boda/cd93b04.pdf>] (accessed 20 August 2013).



At the start of February, the President confirmed the Administration's reluctance. He applauded the efforts of the Co-Chairmen, but stated that the United States did not support the plan as it implied the imposition of the plan's provisions on the parties, with the Muslims left in a 'severe disadvantage.'<sup>128</sup> On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, Christopher presented the results of the policy review and the Administration's position. The crisis, tragic as it was, he remarked, was not the fault of the Administration, it had been inherited, and the US was 'actively' engaged in finding a solution.<sup>129</sup> As if on the campaign trail, the position was long on rhetoric and short on practical measures. Bosnia, Christopher argued, represented a test for US foreign policy in the post-Cold War world.<sup>130</sup> 'Bold tyrants and fearful minorities', he emphasised, 'are watching to see whether "ethnic cleansing" is a policy the world will tolerate...[Our] answer must be a resounding no.'<sup>131</sup> Beyond the rhetoric, the 'Six Point Plan' consisted of a series of measures to contain the risks coming from Bosnia, and to shield the Administration from accusations of inaction or appeasement. The key measures taken were a tightening of sanctions, the establishment of a no-fly zone, and the delivery of humanitarian aid. No definitive measure was taken to end the conflict, and the US made clear its refusal to impose the VOPP on the parties.

Internationally, however, the Administration was unwilling to be seen as retreating completely from the VOPP negotiations. The US appointed Reginald Bartholomew,<sup>132</sup> as US envoy to the negotiating process, but in a

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<sup>128</sup> Bill Clinton, 'The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada,' 5 Feb. 1993, *APP*, [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46799&st=vance&st1=owen#ixzz1vb8rBsBm>] (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>129</sup> Warren Christopher, 'New Steps Toward Conflict Resolution in the Former Yugoslavia,' *US State Department Dispatch*, Vol. 4, No. 7, 15 February 1993 [<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/briefing/dispatch/1993/html/Dispatchv4no07.html>] (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>130</sup> Christopher, *In the stream*, p. 344-345.

<sup>131</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 10.

<sup>132</sup> David Ludlow, 'Direct governmental involvement in the search for a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina,' 1995, *Lord*

UN Security Council session a few days later refused to 'endorse', 'welcome' or 'support' the plan.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, setting a pattern that characterised the Administration's approach to Bosnia, Clinton made a choice with a narrow focus on the short-term, and with little concern for long-term consequences or for the message sent to the warring parties. The President pledged to commit ground troops to Bosnia if the VOPP reached the implementation stage. The measure had two consequences. First, it sent the wrong message to the Serbs: US forces would be on their way only if the fighting ended, not if it continued. Second, if an agreement were reached, the US would be committed to send troops, a possibility that failed to enthuse the military. Furthermore, no one had initially requested US troops for the implementation of the VOPP,<sup>134</sup> and they were (probably) not needed.<sup>135</sup>

### **7.3.3 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 3: 'Lift and strive,' domestic pressures vs. European constraints**

Few failed to notice that Christopher's plan amounted to little more than inaction. As violence in Bosnia increased the Administration started to undergo heavy criticism, coming mainly from Congress. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, in Senate hearings, Silajdzic charged that if the Administration was unwilling to act, Bosnia should have been granted the right to defend itself with a lifting of the arms embargo.<sup>136</sup> This was in line with bipartisan calls from high-ranking members of the Senate, including Robert Dole (R-Ka) and Joseph Biden (D-Del), who had been (and would keep on) calling for a lift. Criticism came also from within the Administration, at the US Embassy to the UN, David Scheffer, Albright's Assistant, wrote to the Ambassador:

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*Owen Papers* [<http://liv.ac.uk/library/sca/owen/boda/sp2a.pdf>] (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>133</sup> Burg and Shoup, *Ethnic*, p. 234.

<sup>134</sup> Owen, *Balkan*, p. 358.

<sup>135</sup> Woodward, Interview with the author.

<sup>136</sup> US Senate, 'American Policy in Bosnia,' *Hearing before the Subcommittee on European Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 18 February 1993, (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1993), p. 52.

The Administration is losing the support of the OP-ED writers and the public affairs talk-show crowd, who are beginning to use words like 'shame', 'shameful'...and 'credibility gap' to describe the Clinton Administration's policy on Bosnia.

And he added: 'We face the serious risk that "multilateralism" will join "Munich" as a codeword for appeasement.'<sup>137</sup> Supportive of Scheffer's view, Albright urged Clinton to adopt more forceful measures, including air strikes. Not unlike the Bush Administration, Clinton also had to confront criticism from several officials resigning from the State Department. In their letter to Christopher, leaked to the *New York Times*, the officials wrote that the Administration, with its inactivity, was rewarding Serb aggression.<sup>138</sup> Public pressure reached its climax with Nobel Prize winner and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel's emotional appeal on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, at the inauguration of the Holocaust Memorial Museum:

Mr. President, I cannot not tell you something. I have been in the former Yugoslavia last fall. I cannot sleep since what I have seen...We must do something to stop the bloodshed in that country.<sup>139</sup>

Feeling the domestic pressure, the principals had been meeting since the end of March to discuss Bosnia. By mid-April, the options had been narrowed down to two: a cease fire, and 'lift and strike;' lift the arms embargo on the Bosnian Muslims, and strike the Serbs if they attack before weapons reach the Muslims. Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin, and the military favoured a cease-fire, as it could take the limelight away from Bosnia. Gore and Albright supported lift and strike.<sup>140</sup> Eventually, with only Aspin opposing the plan,

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<sup>137</sup> David Scheffer Memorandum to Ambassador Albright, 9 April 1993, *Arthur C. Helton, Refugee Protection Policy Collection*, Box 2, Miscellaneous Documents, 'Former Yugoslavia Pt. 1', National Security Archives (NSA), Washington.

<sup>138</sup> Michael Gordon, '12 in State Dept. ask military move against Serbs,' *The New York Times*, 23 April 1993.

<sup>139</sup> John Darnton, 'Does the world still recognize a holocaust?' *The New York Times*, 25 April 1993.

<sup>140</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 12-13.

the President decided to give it a go. Politically, the decision was a winner. As Mark Danner wrote:

The plan had many virtues, although the most striking of these were designed to placate political constituencies at home rather than alter the military situation in Bosnia.<sup>141</sup>

Furthermore, at least on paper, the plan guaranteed that no US troops would be involved. The strategic risks of the choice, however, were massive, both in terms of relations with the allies and in terms of effects on the ground. On the ground, the ICFY mediators had reached an agreement. Serbian President Milosevic, lured by the possibility of a lifting of sanctions on Serbia, had convinced the Bosnian Serbs to sign the Peace Plan. After tense discussions in Athens, the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic had signed the agreement, pending the approval from the Bosnian Serbs 'parliament' in Pale. The signing was concluded on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, as Warren Christopher was landing in London to sell the new plan.<sup>142</sup> As Owen wrote, this was the moment when the US should have put their weight behind the plan, threatening the Bosnian Serbs. Two factors made the Administration wary of any commitment. First, the US had refused to impose the plan on the parties and could not renege on this position even if the Serbs were, now, the ones holding out. Second, the Administration had hurriedly pledged the deployment of troops in case an agreement was reached. The President and others in Washington feared this development.<sup>143</sup> The allies, in turn, feared 'lift and strike.'

At least since the last months of the Bush Administration, when a 'lift and strike' option had first been aired,<sup>144</sup> the Europeans, especially the French and the British, had been opposed. UK and France were among the main contributors to UNPROFOR and their troops had already been involved in

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<sup>141</sup> Danner, 'Clinton,' p. 18.

<sup>142</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 15.

<sup>143</sup> Owen, *Balkan*, p. 152.

<sup>144</sup> According to Susan Woodward, Zalmay Khalilzad, in the Pentagon during the George H. W. Bush Administration, had first developed a 'lift and strike' plan. The Europeans had rejected it. Woodward, Interview with the author.

dangerous, hostage-like situations. The French and British government saw a lift of the embargo as incendiary, turning their troops into hostages, and certainly could not accept airstrikes.<sup>145</sup> US officials believed that the recent increase in violence would have been enough to mollify the allies. They were mistaken. The UK and France were enraged by this new proposal of a policy they had already rejected. A British diplomat reportedly said: 'We told them [not to come to us with a *fait accompli*] until we were blue in the face. We said we can't do "lift and strike", especially lift, our troops are on the ground.'<sup>146</sup> Similarly, Raymond Seitz, US Ambassador to Britain at the time, warned the Administration that the British reaction would have probably ranged 'somewhere between shock and horror.'<sup>147</sup>

Imposing the decision on the Europeans, however, would have made Bosnia an American responsibility; a risk Clinton was unwilling to take. Hence, when Christopher travelled to Europe to present the plan, he did not impose the plan on his European counterparts, but adopted a 'conciliatory approach', meeting the Europeans in a 'listening mode.'<sup>148</sup> The lack of enthusiasm for the plan at home compounded Christopher's reticence.<sup>149</sup> The military had made clear that the plan would not be that simple. The delivery of weapons required a secure corridor, and troops would be needed to create it. The number was set to more than 100,000.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, Clinton famously 'went south' on the policy after reading Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts*. The book allegedly convinced him that nothing could be done

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<sup>145</sup> Roger Cohen, 'US and allies differ on arms for Bosnian Muslims,' *The New York Times*, 22 April 1993, [<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/04/22/world/us-and-allies-differ-on-arms-for-bosnia-muslims.html>] (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>146</sup> Drew, *On the Edge*, p. 155.

<sup>147</sup> Raymond Seitz, *Over Here* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), p. 328.

<sup>148</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 16.

<sup>149</sup> William Safire, 'Who's got clout?' *The New York Times Magazine*, 20 June 1993, [<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/20/magazine/who-s-got-clout.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>] (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>150</sup> Danner, 'Clinton,' p. 18.

to pacify the region's ancient hatreds.<sup>151</sup> The idea that the problem could not be solved - only, at best, contained - prevailed. As a frustrated Christopher put it: 'it is hard to settle a family feud if the family doesn't want to settle it.'<sup>152</sup>

In spite of the strategic disaster and of Christopher's apparent retreat from Europe, airing 'lift and strike' proved a winner domestically. The plan

Provided President Clinton with an effective alibi for his own inaction. If the President had not moved to lift the arms embargo...this was because the Europeans had troops on the ground, and, try as he might, he could not bring them around.<sup>153</sup>

With its half-hearted measures such as not supporting the VOPP and airing unconvincingly 'lift and strike,' the Administration had managed all the domestic political risks that inaction in Bosnia implied. Bosnia could, finally, be taken off the front pages; the Administration could not be accused of inaction. With the same moves, however, it had dismissed two longer-term risks. First, it had opened the gates to transatlantic rivalry. Soon the policy gap would become so deep that one 'could sometimes smell a whiff of Suez.'<sup>154</sup> Second, and more important, the Administration had done nothing to placate the violence in Bosnia. As David Rieff, liberal hawk and critic of the Administration wrote, had President Clinton 'had the moral bottom to get up and say frankly that no decisive help would be forthcoming, the chances are that the Bosnians would have accepted the Vance-Owen plan.'<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Christopher, *In the stream*, p. 347. Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts* (New York: Picador, 1993).

<sup>152</sup> Warren Christopher, Telegram to Embassy Beijing, 26 January 1994, *China and the USA Collection*, NSA.

<sup>153</sup> Danner, 'Clinton,' p. 19.

<sup>154</sup> Seitz, *Over here*, p. 327.

<sup>155</sup> David Rieff, 'The Lessons of Bosnia,' *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring 1995), p. 82.

#### 7.3.4 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 4: 'safe areas' vs. 'shooting galleries'

Being perceived as doing something remained more important than the actions taken. In April 1993, the town of Srebrenica had come under Serb siege. UNPROFOR commander Gen. Philippe Morillon had travelled to the area to open humanitarian corridors. The population of the enclave had kept him hostage until he had pledged UN protection. The United Nations had reacted angrily to what it considered Morillon's cavalier attitude, and had felt somewhat compelled to declare Srebrenica a 'safe area.'<sup>156</sup> On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April, the Security Council had approved Resolution 819, recalling Chapter VII of the Charter, but the forces tasked with the protection of the area had not been given a clear mandate; and Muslim forces had been excluded from the demilitarisation provisions.<sup>157</sup> After the 'lift and strike failure,' on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May, the UN passed a second resolution extending the 'safe area' status to six Muslim enclaves. The 'safe areas' idea gathered momentum, but this could not hide major flaws. First, as Vance and Owen suggested, declaring some areas safe implied that others were 'unsafe,' legitimising Serb conquest.<sup>158</sup> Second, the UN Secretariat had made clear that it did not have enough resources to extend the 'safe area' status to other enclaves.<sup>159</sup> Third, the Muslims forces, excluded from the demilitarisation of the 'safe areas,' could turn them into 'garrisons' to launch attacks.<sup>160</sup> Fourth, the 'safe areas' plunged the UN force on the ground into a completely partisan role it was not prepared to take.<sup>161</sup>

In mid-May, the French government presented a 'non-paper' on ways to implement the 'safe areas' provisions, as a step towards the eventual

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<sup>156</sup> BBC, 'The Death of Yugoslavia – Part 5: A "safe area,"' *BBC Documentary*, 1995.

<sup>157</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 5.

<sup>158</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 101.

<sup>159</sup> UN General Assembly, 'The Fall of Srebrenica,' *Report to the Secretary General*, 15 November 1999, [<http://www.un.org/peace/srebrenica.pdf>] (accessed 20 August 2013), p. 19.

<sup>160</sup> Owen, *Balkan*, p. 178.

<sup>161</sup> William Durch, 'Keeping the peace: politics and lessons of the 1990s,' in Durch (Ed.), *UN Peacekeeping*, p. 19.

implementation of the VOPP. The paper stated that between 10,000 and 12,000 troops would have been enough to 'sanctuarize the areas,' and that the credibility of the plan would have been increased if Russia and the US were to contribute troops.<sup>162</sup> Both Clinton and Christopher, however, had understood the strategic risks involved. Clinton admitted that he was unwilling to send US troops into 'shooting galleries.'<sup>163</sup> Christopher defined them as an 'unworkable idea.'<sup>164</sup> But the tone of the Administration changed as soon as the 'political benefits' of the plan were understood. The idea could take the limelight away from Bosnia and from the peace process. When Russian foreign Minister Kozyrev seemed ready to bring back a discussion of the VOPP at the Security Council, Christopher hijacked the attempt inviting him and European foreign ministers to Washington to discuss a new plan.<sup>165</sup> Kozyrev's urgency was due to the fact that the Bosnian Serbs, with a referendum, had rejected the VOPP and tough action was needed.

This, however, was not the Administration's target risk. After the 'lift and strike' debacle, the Administration had reassessed the Bosnia situation, and had identified the improvement of relations with the allies as its target risk, and it also wanted to bring Russia closer to the US position. In managing this risk, not much was left in terms of measures to ease the Bosnian conflict. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, the US, Russia, Spain, France and Britain, in a grandiose ceremony, signed a Joint Action Plan (JAP).<sup>166</sup> The powers agreed to protect the six 'safe areas' - with the US providing only air support - to support the establishment of an international war crime tribunal, as decided by UN resolution 808 of February 1993,<sup>167</sup> to place monitors on the Serbian border,

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<sup>162</sup> Owen, *Balkan*: 165.

<sup>163</sup> Daaler, *Getting*, p. 18.

<sup>164</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 110.

<sup>165</sup> Drew, *On the Edge*, p. 162.

<sup>166</sup> 'Joint Action Programme on Bosnia, put forward by France, the Russian Federation, Spain, the UK and the US (25 May 1993),' [<http://liv.ac.uk/library/sca/owen/boda/mi12.pdf>] (accessed 20 August 2013), *Lord Owen Papers*.

<sup>167</sup> Resolution 808 asked the Secretary General to complete a report on the issue. Resolution 827 of 25<sup>th</sup> May 1993 received the Secretary's report and confirmed the establishment of the tribunal.



and to increase the international presence in Kosovo and Macedonia.<sup>168</sup> In line with a risk management approach, the 'safe areas' and the JAP were accepted as victories. The measures, though, were minimalist and short-term. As Marshall Harris recently put it, even in a best-case scenario, that is, provided the enclaves survived, no one had thought where the refugees flooding the areas might end up living.<sup>169</sup> Everybody knew that the existence of the safe areas depended largely on the good will of the Serbs (not the most reliable factor), but the safe areas 'had begun to serve a 'greater' political interest than the actual needs of the beleaguered people of...Bosnian towns.'<sup>170</sup> They managed several short-term risks. They could help in stymieing refugees' migration to Europe, and in giving the impression of a concerned international community.<sup>171</sup> In the euphoria following the JAP, few noticed that Izetbegovic had been the first in criticising the areas, calling them 'reserves.'<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, the JAP 'papered over' disagreement among the allies. The 'safe areas' represented the common denominator that had permitted the agreement.<sup>173</sup>

With the agreement the US and Russia had *de facto* agreed to accept Serbian gains.<sup>174</sup> This was, at best, an ironic conclusion, since the Administration had dismissed the VOPP's calls for a Serb rollback as appeasement. When, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 836, extending UNPROFOR's mandate in the safe areas, Western countries confirmed the bankruptcy of their position. In spite of having both signed the agreement

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<sup>168</sup> Warren Christopher, 'Opening statement at joint news conference,' 22 May 1993

[<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/briefing/dossec/1993/9305/930522dossec.html>] (accessed 21 September 2013).

<sup>169</sup> Harris, Interview with the author.

<sup>170</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 115.

<sup>171</sup> Woodward, Interview with the author.

<sup>172</sup> NIOD, 'Part – 1,' p. 658.

<sup>173</sup> NIOD, 'Part – 1,' p. 657.

<sup>174</sup> Elaine Sciolino, 'US and Russia agree on strategy accepting Serbian gains for now,' *The New York Times*, 21 May 1993,

[<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/21/world/us-and-russia-agree-on-strategy-accepting-serbian-gains-for-now.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>] (accessed 25 September 2013).

and sponsored the resolution, none of the signatories was willing to supply troops to secure the safe areas. Kofi Annan, UN Director of Peace Keeping Operations, made clear that 34,000 troops were needed. The UK and France were unwilling to take additional responsibilities. The US and Russia bluntly refused any commitment.<sup>175</sup>

### **7.3.5 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 5: 'great power politics' and domestic constraints vs. Bosnian escalation**

The fine balancing act that had led to the establishment of the 'safe areas' would be repeated throughout the end of 1993 and 1994. The Clinton Administration would often be spurred into action, sometimes by TV images, but the images were not enough to change policy.<sup>176</sup> Clinton's predicament was complex. Unwilling to face the risks of intervention, or of strained relations with other great powers on one side, and the domestic risks of inaction on the other, he would often settle for token measures. The decisions made had more to do with managing the risks inherent in maintaining transatlantic, or great power, harmony, and those inherent in domestic criticism, than with ending the war in Bosnia.

#### *7.3.5.1 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 5a: European pressures vs. domestic pressures*

In July 1993, while the G-7 gathered in Tokyo, the situation in Sarajevo turned dramatic. As Daalder recalled, the media were all over the crisis. Gruesome TV images shocked Clinton<sup>177</sup> and spurred him to ask his advisors to review all the options available in Bosnia, including ground troops. The Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral David Jeremiah set the troop requirement to ease the pressure on Sarajevo at 70000. Powell later reduced it to 25000, but the number was still too high to be politically

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<sup>175</sup> NIOD, 'Part – 1,' p. 664.

<sup>176</sup> Warren Strobel, 'TV images may shock but won't alter policy,' *The Christian Science Monitor*, 14 December 1994.

<sup>177</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 19.

viable.<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, uncertainty remained as to the possibility of Serbia's intervention in the conflict if the US sent ground troops. A Serbian intervention, in turn, could make an escalation with Russia possible. The military won the day, the principals opted for air strikes. Lake and Bartholomew travelled to Europe to sell the plan. As Lake wrote, 'this would not be a "trial balloon"' like 'lift and strike.'<sup>179</sup> The envoys affirmed that 'the President had decided' and were the Europeans to reject US plans, Sarajevo might collapse making a 'mockery' of the upcoming NATO summit, scheduled for January 1994. Furthermore, the fall of the city would also imperil the future of the Atlantic Alliance with bitter recriminations from both sides.<sup>180</sup>

After a marathon session, the North Atlantic Council seemed to take a strong position. 'The alliance', a press release on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August read,

Has now decided to make immediate preparations for undertaking, in the event that the strangulation of Sarajevo and other areas continues...stronger measures including air strikes.

The actions would be taken under the authority of the UN Security Council and the NATO Military Authority was tasked to draw up plans for air strike options.<sup>181</sup> Once again, the US presented the agreement as a great success. Yet, many elements seemed to suggest that the declaration confirmed the Administration's minimalist approach and its priorities in risk management. First, some flaws were clear in the statement. As Elizabeth Drew noted:

The resolution didn't state that strangulation...should be acted against, or that force could be used to get the warring parties to the negotiating table.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Gow, *Triumph*, p. 275.

<sup>179</sup> Anthony Lake's note, 26 July 1993, Box 43, Clinton Administration, NSC Subject File, Miscellany, Folder 10, Notes on Bosnia-Herzegovina, ALP, LoC.

<sup>180</sup> Drew, *On the Edge*, p. 277.

<sup>181</sup> *The New York Times*, 'NATO Chief on Bosnia: "Ready for Air Power,"' 4 August 1993.

<sup>182</sup> Drew, *On the Edge*, p. 277.

Second, to get a deal the US had surrendered to European requests. The command of the airstrikes would be shared with the UN.<sup>183</sup> This 'dual key' arrangement would prevent any effective use of force, since the countries with troops on the ground were naturally opposed to air strikes. The need to maintain NATO's harmony, and to manage risks inherent in transatlantic rifts overshadowed the risks in the longer term. As Owen and Stoltenberg (Vance's successor as UN envoy) kept on repeating, the 'mirage' of air strikes convinced the Bosnian Muslims that if they resisted a bit longer the US would eventually enter the fray. This conviction hardened their position in the negotiations for the new Owen-Stoltenberg plan.<sup>184</sup>

#### 7.3.5.2 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 5b: Russian concerns vs. Bosnian nightmares

A similar minimalism was evident after the following escalation. Since the NAC declaration, the US had continued its talk of air strikes, disturbing the allies. During the 1994 NATO Council, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé urged the Administration to 'put or shut up'. At the moment, he suggested, the US was both refusing to intervene militarily, and supporting the Bosnian Muslims in their refusal to accept any peace agreement.<sup>185</sup> The US envoy to the ICFY, Bartholomew, had often been more prone to act 'as a conduit for Izetbegovic to put requests to the Co-Chairmen,' than as an honest broker.<sup>186</sup> The external pressure reinvigorated critics of inaction within the Administration. Albright had raised her concerns in a memo to the President, arguing that the lack of leadership was damaging the US image abroad.<sup>187</sup> Lake was starting to share this view.<sup>188</sup> But more hawkish voices faced stern opposition from the military. Beyond personal or institutional rivalries, the real problem facing the Administration was the same that had

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<sup>183</sup> Gow, *Triumph*, p. 136.

<sup>184</sup> Paul Lewis, 'Bosnia President refuses to budge,' *The New York Times*, 5 August 1993.

<sup>185</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 24.

<sup>186</sup> Ludlow, 'Direct governmental,' pt. 1.

<sup>187</sup> Dobbs, *Madeleine*, p. 359.

<sup>188</sup> Anthony Lake, *6 Nightmares* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2000), p. 142.

characterised the last years of the Bush Presidency: the uncertainty as to the possibilities open to American military power. The military's caution had recently received a tremendous boost with the debacle in Somalia. This had led to a major re-thinking of the initial Administration pro-UN position - enshrined in Presidential Review 13 - and had raised the profile of Powell-style approaches to military intervention.<sup>189</sup> Somalia confirmed the well-established reluctance to involve ground troops, and this was the main object of Juppé's criticism.

When a shell exploded in the Sarajevo marketplace, the Administration proved unable or unwilling to take a stand. Clinton declared himself 'outraged' by the bombing, and made clear that Bosnia was in the US interest since the US needed to prevent the spread of the war, reduce the flow of refugees, and ease the humanitarian catastrophe. Confirming minimalism, no mention was made of a specific interest in (or practical measures for) ending the war.<sup>190</sup> The US went along with a French plan to establish an exclusion zone for artillery around the Bosnian capital. The initial French proposal called for an increased number of ground troops to secure the zone. The Administration lobbied to reduce the zone from 30 to 20km and to exclude ground troops from the plan.<sup>191</sup> NATO approved the plan on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February. A failure to comply with demilitarisation and with a ceasefire in Sarajevo would have been followed by air strikes.

What this plan overlooked was Russia's fury at having been excluded from the discussion. Since the start of the war, Russia had been in a dire position. The main aim of President Boris Yeltsin's foreign policy had been to present Russia as a great power, thus diverting criticism from nationalist groups within Russia and the Russian Parliament. Clinton had established a good

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<sup>189</sup> Jeffrey Smith and Julia Preston, 'United States Plans Wider Role in U.N. Peace Keeping,' *The Washington Post*, 18 June 1993.

<sup>190</sup> Bill Clinton, 'Responding to the Sarajevo marketplace bombing,' *State Department Dispatch*, Vol. 5, No. 8, 21 February 1994 [<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/briefing/dispatch/1994/html/Dispatchv5no08.html>] (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>191</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 25.

working relationship with the Russian President, managing his bouts of nationalism and his sometimes-unpredictable behaviour.<sup>192</sup> Bosnia, however, was a sensitive issue, with many in Russia believing that Yeltsin should have done more for the Serbs. Yeltsin was also under fire for his passive attitude towards NATO expansion.<sup>193</sup> Among the main critics was Vladimir Zhirinovsky, Russia's opposition leader and Yeltsin's nemesis, who had travelled to Belgrade in January 1994 to pledge Russian military intervention in case of Western air strikes.<sup>194</sup> A situation such as the Sarajevo ultimatum and a humiliation for Russia was exactly what Yeltsin and Deputy Foreign Minister, Vitaly Churkin, feared.<sup>195</sup> All Russia's frustration exploded in a phone call from Yeltsin to Clinton on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February in which the Russian President warned that they 'had better stay in touch on urgent matters that might even involve nuclear weapons.'<sup>196</sup>

Eventually, the Serbs and the Bosnian Muslims accepted the demilitarisation, the latter after UNPROFOR Commander Gen. Michael Rose's strong convincing.<sup>197</sup> No one was more relieved than Clinton. The President confided to Taylor Branch that the ultimatum had been given more as a bluff 'stitched over strong objections from countries with troops deployed as peacekeepers in Bosnia.' Carrying out the bombing would have caused unacceptable risks for the US and for relations with the allies.<sup>198</sup> Still, the Administration and the Bosnians paid a high price. Russia, excluded by the ultimatum agreement, had gone directly to the Serbs convincing them to withdraw in exchange for the deployment of Russian peacekeepers. Although a face-saving device for Russia, the deployment was certainly not

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<sup>192</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand* (New York: Random House, 2002)

<sup>193</sup> Talbott, *The Russia*, p. 121, and Dumbrell, 'President Bill Clinton.'

<sup>194</sup> Talbott, *The Russia*, p. 121.

<sup>195</sup> Cohen, *Broken*, p. 301.

<sup>196</sup> Talbott, *The Russia*, p. 122.

<sup>197</sup> Michael Rose Gen. Sir, *Fighting for Peace* (London: Warner Books, 1999), p. 71.

<sup>198</sup> Taylor Branch, *The Clinton Tapes* (New York: Pocket Books, 2009), p. 120.

optimal for the US, or the Bosnians, who saw Russian troops entering Sarajevo with a big smile and the Serbian three-fingered salute.<sup>199</sup>

#### *7.3.5.3 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 5c: Contact Group cohesion vs. Bosnia's future*

The 'Sarajevo ultimatum' success seemed to convince the US of the need for a more active role. The US started negotiations, led by Under-Secretary of State Peter Tarnoff and the new US ICFY envoy Charles Redman, to reach an agreement between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats for the creation of a Federation. As with previous measures, the Washington Agreement, although a success on the surface, entailed long-term risks. First, it officially established the partition of Bosnia into two separate entities - something that plans such as the VOPP had tried to avoid - with no space left for moderate Serbs.<sup>200</sup> Second, the agreement lacked any provision for (and the Administration seemed to lack any understanding of) what the future of the Serb 'entity' in Bosnia would be. Third, in the long-term, as many suggested, the US had conceded far too much to Tudjman and the Croats to get their signature on the plan.

The agreement opened the gates for the transit of weapons from the Croats to the Muslims, increasing the 'weapon tax' levered by the Croats on any shipment.<sup>201</sup> More generally, the understanding was that Tudjman had signed the agreement after a pledge from Clinton to solve Croatia's problems. Tudjman also understood that the US would look more favourably at his project to retake the Krajina region, under Serb occupation, if he signed the deal.<sup>202</sup> Croatia would receive military equipment and training from private US contractors, with the acquiescence of the State Department.<sup>203</sup> This renewed US activism was coupled with Russian frustration with the Serbs, especially after the attack on Gorazde, a

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<sup>199</sup> Rose, *Fighting*, p. 88.

<sup>200</sup> David Ludlow, 'Direct governmental.'

<sup>201</sup> Danner, 'Operation.'

<sup>202</sup> Cohen, *Broken*, p. 298.

<sup>203</sup> Danner, 'Operation.'

'safe area', had exposed Russia to international criticism for its support of the Serbs. These developments led to the creation of the Contact Group in April 1994, which also included France, Britain and Germany. Throughout the spring and summer of 1994, the Group worked to develop a new plan and a new map to bring peace to Bosnia. The situation in Washington, however, often weakened the US position in the Group.

Albright, faced with the impossibility of changing the situation from within, showed commitment to the Bosnian Muslims' cause with public diplomacy, including the dramatic inauguration of the American Embassy in Sarajevo.<sup>204</sup> Furthermore, the Administration was increasingly coming under domestic pressure to lift the arms embargo and to conduct air strikes. In the spring of 1994, the Senate held yet another session of Hearings on the effects of a possible lifting of the arms embargo. The discussion epitomised the risks confronted by the Administration. Representatives of European countries, including France and the UK, warned the Administration of the strategic risks of a lift: an increase in violence, the end of the peace process, and the possibility of UNPROFOR's withdrawal. But these voices were submerged by criticism. Ejup Ganic, from the Bosnian Presidency went on the attack, pushing for a lift. He accused the Administration of having lived in a 'Hamlet-like dilemma' that had allowed the accumulation of 'dead bodies.' Richard Perle, former Assistant Secretary of Defense, working as lobbyist for the Bosnian Muslims,<sup>205</sup> accused Christopher of having bowed to European pressures. Members of the Administration tried to defend the refusal to lift arguing that it posed risks of escalation.<sup>206</sup>

Criticism would not stop. Feeling the pressure, Clinton famously exploded against CNN journalist Christine Amanpour, denying the journalist's

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<sup>204</sup> Dobbs, *Madeleine*, p. 361.

<sup>205</sup> Woodward, Interview with the author.

<sup>206</sup> US Senate, 'Impact of a unilateral United States lifting of the arms embargo on the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina,' *Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services*, United States Senate, 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 23 June 1994, pp. 1-30, p. 44, p. 51, pp. 54-79.



accusations of 'flip-flopping,' and shifting responsibility to the Europeans for their rejection of 'lift and strike.'<sup>207</sup> Within the Contact Group, these noises created several problems. But, as many authors have suggested, the Group acted precisely as a forum to ease rivalries among great powers. Decisions taken within the group would represent a 'lowest-common denominator approach,' pursuing minimalist strategies and goals. Furthermore, the existence of the Group and its decisions helped the Administration in managing domestic risks. The Administration could justify its own resistance to the policy options suggested by domestic critics, by citing the difficulties of an international mediation effort; but in the Group it would not accept solution that were unwise domestically.<sup>208</sup>

The key trade-off pitted risks inherent in straining the relations with the other members of the group against taking stronger measures to ease the situation in Bosnia. Events in the second part of 1994, demonstrated that the Administration was not ready to put Bosnia first. First, as the Contact Group was discussing a possible new map, many realised that the enclaves in Eastern Bosnia, including Srebrenica, complicated the drawing of a map. Even the Bosnian Muslims had accepted the need to 'simplify' the map and they had showed a willingness to swap Srebrenica for areas around Sarajevo. Haris Silajdzic, Bosnian Prime Minister, had stated, with Izetbegovic's approval, that he was ready to go to Srebrenica, to convince the people that they had to leave. For the Contact Group, however, and particularly for the US, such a position was a non-starter. As US envoy Redman confirmed, no one could be seen making a deal that involved a land swap with the Serbs, especially Clinton, who, from the start, had made a clear distinction between the Serb aggressor and the Bosnian victim. Members of the Administration, such as Gore and Albright, were heavily

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<sup>207</sup> Bill Clinton, 'Interview on CNN's 'Global Forum With President Clinton,' 3 May 1994, *APP*, [http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=50095&st=bosnia&st1=#ixzz1ukW7X4ff] (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>208</sup> Helen Leigh-Phippard, 'The Contact Group on (and in) Bosnia,' *International journal*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 306-324, and Ludlow, 'Governmental.'

opposed and such a move would have created a barrage of public criticism.<sup>209</sup>

Second, in July, the Group presented its peace plan and a new map on a 'take-it-or-leave-it' basis, but the Bosnian Serbs were unimpressed. The cards that the Administration could play to convince the Serbs were soon deprived of any meaning. As always, lifting the arms embargo appealed to many at home. Yet, the allies made clear that in case of unilateral lift, UNPROFOR would leave, increasing the tempo of the fighting. The US government would be confronted by Muslim pleas for help and it would have a hard time ignoring them.<sup>210</sup> Russia opposed the second card; that is, using Milosevic to convince the Bosnian Serbs, by threatening an increase in sanctions on Serbia. Furthermore, Milosevic seemed to have outsmarted the Contact Group. As the prospect of sanctions on Serbia approached, he declared that Serbia had severed ties with the Bosnian Serbs.<sup>211</sup> No measure was taken. The harmony of the Contact Group overshadowed risks of increased violence in Bosnia. As Owen suggested, with the failure of the 'take-it-or-leave-it' gamble:

The Contact Group nations...had lost authority in the region, and the Bosnian Serbs and the Croatian government had felt emboldened to take aggressive action.<sup>212</sup>

The safe area of Bihac was now on the Serbs' radar.

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<sup>209</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 163-164.

<sup>210</sup> Owen, *Balkan*, p. 290.

<sup>211</sup> Stephen Kinzer, 'Serb vs. Serb, Belgrade vs. Bosnia,' *The New York Times*, 11 August 1994.

<sup>212</sup> Owen, *Balkan*, p. 329.

#### 7.3.5.4 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 5d: domestic upheaval vs. European concerns

In Washington, the situation had turned even worse for Clinton. In the 1994 mid-term elections, the Democratic Party suffered a staggering defeat, with Republicans regaining control of both the House and the Senate. Clinton was reportedly shocked, he felt like a 'hostage in the White House.'<sup>213</sup> Although their party was riding on the largely domestic 'Contract with America', many Republicans felt emboldened to criticise the President's record on Bosnia. The critics also included leading Democrats, such as Biden.<sup>214</sup> Biden, Dole and other Senators had travelled to Sarajevo, to meet Izetbegovic, and had not been supportive of US policy.<sup>215</sup> In no position to contest the now predominantly Republican Congress, Clinton yielded. The US government would not unilaterally lift the arms embargo, but it would stop enforcing it.<sup>216</sup> The decision had few consequences on the ground, since most of the weapons were already delivered by air, and since the Europeans played the key role in enforcing it.<sup>217</sup> The decision, however, put the US in direct contrast with the rest of the Contact Group.

The tension within the Group reached its peak as the Serbs attacked the 'safe area' of Bihac, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November. Bosnian Muslims had launched an offensive from the safe area, confirming the point that the enclaves could be turned into garrisons. The boldness, power and disregard for the

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<sup>213</sup> Mark Penn in PBS, *American Experience: Clinton*, Pt. 1, 2012, [<http://video.pbs.org/video/2195106954/>] (accessed 25 September 2013).

<sup>214</sup> Joe Biden, 'More UN appeasement on Bosnia,' *The New York Times*, 7 June 1993.

<sup>215</sup> American Embassy Vienna, Memorandum to Secretary of State, 7 June 1994, Incoming FOIA Collection, Box 2a, 'Bosnia 19946, Students Against Genocide at al. vs. State Department *et al.*,' NSA.

<sup>216</sup> Paul Fenton, 'Por que EEUU deo de hacer cumplir el embargo de armas contra Bosnia en noviembre de 1994?' *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 32 (1996), p. 137.

<sup>217</sup> New York Times News Service, 'US To Stop Enforcing Bosnia Arms Embargo,' *Chicago Tribune*, 11 November 1994 [[http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1994-11-11/news/9411110243\\_1\\_flood-of-new-arms-weapons-embargo-bosnia-or-croatia](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1994-11-11/news/9411110243_1_flood-of-new-arms-weapons-embargo-bosnia-or-croatia)] (accessed 20 August 2013).

international community of the Serb counter-attack was, however, unprecedented. Croatian Serb forces joined the Bosnian Serbs, risking a massive escalation, involving Croatia.<sup>218</sup> Planes had taken off from the air base of Ubdina, in the territory of Serb occupied Krajina, allegedly under UN protection, and fuel for the aircraft had been provided by Belgrade, in violation of a previous agreement between Milosevic and the Group.<sup>219</sup> The US initially had its way. To punish the Serbs for Bihac, NATO carried out air strikes. Bosnian Serbs were not deterred. They blockaded and detained UN peacekeepers and stopped any movement of UN personnel. UNPROFOR Commander Michael Rose admitted that the peacekeepers were effectively 'hostages,' and Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic warned that in case of any further attack all UN and NATO personnel would be considered enemy forces.<sup>220</sup> These developments, coupled with the previous US decision on the embargo, represented the last straw for the Europeans. They let the US know that they had reached the 'end of the road': either the US was willing to send troops to Bosnia or they would reject any escalation.

The Administration was faced with risks on all sides. The Serbs could go unpunished, NATO could be severely damaged, and, in case of UN withdrawal, the US might have to help the Bosnian Muslims alone. Faced with the possibility of undermining NATO, the Administration abandoned any project of tough action against the Bosnian Serbs. In managing the risks of divisions within NATO, the Administration overlooked other risks. First, on the domestic side, its critics felt emboldened. In a remark similar to one Clinton had made in his campaign, Newt Gingrich (R-GE and new Speaker of the House) went on the record suggesting that the Administration should

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<sup>218</sup> Daalder, *Getting*: 31.

<sup>219</sup> Thomas Weiss, 'Collective spinelessness,' in Ullman, *The World*: 65.

<sup>220</sup> Roger Cohen, 'Fighting rages as NATO debates how to protect Bosnian enclave,' *The New York Times*, 25 November 1994, [<http://www.nytimes.com/1994/11/25/world/fighting-rages-as-nato-debates-how-to-protect-bosnian-enclave.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>] (accessed 20 August 2013).

threaten an all-out offensive against the Serbs with a Desert Storm-style air campaign.<sup>221</sup>

These voices were now starting to represent a broader concern with the situation in Bosnia shared by several journalists in key newspapers such as *The New York Times*, by the media, by political circles, and by citizen groups in Washington. George Soros financed the American Committee to save Bosnia and the Balkan Action Council, including former members of the Bush and Clinton Administrations. They had access to the decision-making circles and to members of Congress.<sup>222</sup> On the strategic side, the Administration had conceded a victory to the Bosnian Serbs. Preserving NATO meant abandoning plans for military action. The only way forward was negotiation, an extremely painful conclusion since the US had criticised the VOPP for rewarding aggression.<sup>223</sup> In a replay of his earlier decision on the VOPP, Clinton went an extra mile to demonstrate his commitment to NATO. He pledged the use of up to 25000 US ground troops within a NATO framework to extract the UN personnel in case of withdrawal.<sup>224</sup> As will soon be clear he would come to regret such a decision.

### **7.3.6 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 6: domestic risk vs. strategic nightmares**

#### *7.3.6.1 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 6a: political risks vs. chances for peace*

The first months of 1995 proved that the US government was unwilling either to accept the domestic political risks of compromise, or the risks of intervention. In December 1994, former US President Jimmy Carter had brokered a four months cease-fire among the parties.<sup>225</sup> As the deadline of the ceasefire approached, the military situation of the Bosnian Muslims had

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<sup>221</sup> Steven Greenhouse, 'Gingrich is urging a tougher policy on the Bosnian Serbs,' *The New York Times*, 4 December 1994.

<sup>222</sup> Harris, Interview with the author.

<sup>223</sup> See Daalder, *Getting*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>224</sup> Chollet, *The Road*, p. 9.

<sup>225</sup> Carter Center, 'Bosnia'

[<http://www.cartercenter.org/countries/bosnia.html>] (accessed 20 August 2013).

improved through the creation of the Federation, and through the provision of weapons from Muslim countries, including Iran, with the acquiescence of the US government.<sup>226</sup> Some authors also argued that the ranks of the Bosnian Muslims were increasingly composed of militias from terrorist groups.<sup>227</sup> The Bosnian Serbs were, thus, cornered. The new commander of UNRPOFOR forces in Bosnia, Lt. Gen. Rupert Smith, told its men that the Serbs would soon be ready to fight and to improve their defensive positions. This almost certainly entailed 'doing something' about the Muslim enclaves.<sup>228</sup> The Clinton Administration did not share the sense of urgency. In early 1995, Lake, increasingly frustrated by US policy in Bosnia, called for a major review of all the options. The State Department favoured the status quo, whereas the Pentagon preferred a policy of active containment; that is the adoption of a neutral stand. More generally, many argued that since the cease-fire was still holding, it made no sense to change policy.<sup>229</sup> No change occurred. Later, as the fighting restarted, the US played a leading role in rejecting two developments that might have improved the situation on the ground.

At the UN, Albright took the lead in rejecting a plan to restructure the UN Forces. Building on recommendations from the UN Secretary General, Gen. Bernard Janvier and Lt. Gen. Rupert Smith, UNPROFOR commanders, argued that, since no country had offered the additional troops required, the 'effectiveness and security' of UNPROFOR's forces should be improved, and this meant redeployment. Forces should be concentrated in central Bosnia, to make them less vulnerable to hostage taking, and should be withdrawn from the Muslim enclaves (leaving only a few observers), since UN troops could not defend the areas anyway.<sup>230</sup> After the Generals' briefing at the Security Council, Albright accused them of 'dumping the safe areas' and

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<sup>226</sup> Mark Danner, 'Hypocrisy in Action,' *The New Yorker*, 13 May 1996.

<sup>227</sup> Gibbs, *First*, p. 157, and Holbrooke, *To end*, p. 50. For an extreme view see John Schlinder, *Unholy Terror* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2007).

<sup>228</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 145.

<sup>229</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 88.

<sup>230</sup> Hong and Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 152.

argued that the United States could not accept the plan. As Danner wrote, Albright had come to believe the 'political fiction' of the 'safe areas.' The Administration had sold the 'safe areas' policy to the public as a strong commitment. With the US still posturing as tough on Bosnia, abandoning it would have been hard to explain.<sup>231</sup> Such a position overlooked that the risk of UN forces being taken hostage prevented any strong action against the Serbs, including the air strikes that Albright often invoked. But it also overlooked that the situation of the safe areas was desperate and that they were already 'lost.'<sup>232</sup>

The failure of talks between the US and Serbia's President Milosevic demonstrated the same dismissal of strategic risks. The talks built on the possibility of Serbia's recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina in exchange for a lifting of sanctions on Serbia. Bosnian Muslim authorities had even made public that they would not restart the war, at the end of the ceasefire, if Serbia recognised Bosnia-Herzegovina. An agreement seemed within reach. Milosevic would have recognised Bosnia and sealed the border with the Bosnian Serbs in exchange for a 'suspension,' not a complete lifting, of the sanctions. Many in the US Administration balked at the possibility. Christopher, Albright and Gore still argued that the Serbs had to be punished and no deal could be cut with them. Albright even threatened to resign if this 'softly-softly pact' was finalised.<sup>233</sup> Robert Frasure, the American negotiator, was instructed to go back with a stronger proposal: sanctions could now be re-imposed not by a vote of the Security Council, but by the request of any permanent member of the Council. The deal was lost.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Mark Danner, 'Bosnia: breaking the machine,' *The New York Review of Books*, 19 February 1998.

<sup>232</sup> Joe Sacco, *Safe area Gorazde* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), p. 149.

<sup>233</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 170.

<sup>234</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, pp. 170-171 and Laura Silber, 'Deal with Milosevic to recognize Bosnia stalls over sanctions issue,' *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1995 [[http://articles.latimes.com/1995-05-24/news/mn-5499\\_1\\_robert-frasure](http://articles.latimes.com/1995-05-24/news/mn-5499_1_robert-frasure)] (accessed 20 August 2013).

Beyond the opposition within the Administration, the failure of the deal was in line with Clinton's policy on Bosnia. President Clinton, who had identified the Serbs as the main aggressor in the war since his Presidential campaign, needed a strong punitive element if any deal with the Serbs was to be accepted by Congress and the public. In the effort to adopt a tough posture, the US lost another chance of improving (even if only marginally) the situation. Furthermore, it could be argued that the Administration had failed in managing even the domestic risks. Criticism of the Administration's inaction continued. As late as March, Strobe Talbott was calling for the US to be more 'eagle' than 'ostrich,'<sup>235</sup> but to no avail. In Serbia, where his willingness to compromise had been heavily questioned, Milosevic was now cornered. The only way forward was an all-out support for the Bosnian Serbs and their efforts to end the war on their own terms.<sup>236</sup> The fighting that had remained at a low level at the start of 1995, re-exploded in May, with the improved weather and, crucially, after the failure of the Milosevic-Frasure talks.

*7.3.6.2 Risk vs. Risk trade-off 6b: strategic risks vs. Presidential nightmares, towards Srebrenica*

On the 25<sup>th</sup> May the Bosnian Serbs savagely attacked Tuzla. NATO reacted with an unprecedented bombing of weapons depots in Pale, the Bosnian Serbs' capital. The Serbs, this time, took hundreds of UN hostages as reprisal. Lt. Gen. Smith was unimpressed, he wanted to 'break the machine' of hostage taking. He knew that for the Serbs, killing the hostages would have been too risky and wanted to call the bluff. No one else agreed. In the Security Council no one called for additional airstrikes and with the hostages used as human shields, even Washington abandoned the idea.<sup>237</sup> The UN, fearful of escalation, brokered a deal with the Bosnian Serbs for the

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<sup>235</sup> Strobe Talbott, 'American Eagle or Ostrich? The Case for U.S. Leadership,' Remarks 20 March 1995, *State Department Dispatch*, Vol. 6, No. 13, 27 March, 1995.

<sup>236</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 172.

<sup>237</sup> Daalder, *Getting and on Danner*, 'Breaking.'



release of the hostages. After a meeting between Janvier and Mladic, the UN Secretary General's representative Yasushi Akashi, Smith and Janvier, met to discuss the future of the mission and stated that UNPROFOR would return to 'traditional peacekeeping principles,' that is, it would no longer conduct attacks on the Serbs.<sup>238</sup> To confirm the change, air strikes now had to be approved directly by the UN Secretary General in New York, increasing dramatically the length of the process and depriving them of any effectiveness.<sup>239</sup> Furthermore, UNPROFOR troops were given new instructions. Directive 1/95 in March 1995 had already stated that the Bosnian population should have been protected, but that any risk for UN personnel in doing so should have been avoided.<sup>240</sup> Directive 2/95 stated that the 'execution of the mandate [was] secondary to the security of UN personnel,' and that force was to be used strictly for self-defence and only as a last resort.<sup>241</sup> With the taking of the hostages, and the situation of UNPROFOR worsening, the possibility of a UN withdrawal now loomed large. In his memoirs, Clinton expressed the several pressures he faced:

I was reluctant to go along with Senator Dole in unilaterally lifting the arms embargo, for fear of weakening the United Nations...I also didn't want to divide the NATO alliance by unilaterally bombing Serb military positions, especially since there were European, but no American, soldiers on the ground...And I didn't want to send American troops there.<sup>242</sup>

To be sure, the hurried pledge to deploy US ground troops in case of UN withdrawal worsened Clinton's position. NATO had already developed a plan to extricate the UN forces. OPLAN 40104 envisaged the deployment of 82,000 NATO troops including 25,000 Americans. The cost for the US would have been staggering: \$700 million. According to General Wesley Clark

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<sup>238</sup> Weiss, 'Collective,' p. 44, and David Rohde, *Endgame* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), p. 362.

<sup>239</sup> Rohde, *Endgame*, p. 26.

<sup>240</sup> NIOD, Part III, 'The Fall of Srebrenica,' [<http://www.srebrenica-project.com/DOWNLOAD/NOD/NIOD%20Part%20III.pdf>] (accessed 21 September 2013), p. 507.

<sup>241</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, p. 8, and NIOD, Part III, p. 491.

<sup>242</sup> Clinton, *My Life*, p. 531.

OPLAN 40104 was a major war plan, with high risk of conflict both before and during the withdrawal.<sup>243</sup> The specifics of the plan assigned to US troops the hazardous duty of extricating UN troops from the Muslim enclaves.<sup>244</sup>

For Clinton, who allegedly had not realised the level of automaticity inherent in the NATO plan,<sup>245</sup> this represented the worst nightmare. He was relieved when the attention momentarily shifted to France's proposal for a Rapid Reaction Force. The RRF served the short-term purpose of maintaining UNPROFOR in place, delaying the possibility of US ground involvement. Politically, however, French President Jacques Chirac's bid for leadership required an American response. New Secretary of Defense William Perry and the new Chairman of the JCS, Gen. John Shalikashvili, suggested that, if asked to do so, US troops should help the UN force to redeploy. Not everyone agreed, but Clinton, spurred by Lake, accepted the suggestion. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, in an address at the Air Force Academy, Clinton stated that beyond the longstanding commitment to help in case of withdrawal, 'if necessary, and after consultation with Congress,' the US should be prepared to 'assist NATO if it decides to meet a request from the United Nations troops for help in a withdrawal or a reconfiguration and a strengthening of its forces.'<sup>246</sup> In other words, Clinton seemed to go beyond withdrawal with help in 'reconfiguration' and 'strengthening.' The change created a domestic uproar.

Dole took advantage of the speech to reinforce his role as leading voice on Bosnia, his challenge to Presidential leadership, and his potential role as 1996 Republican Presidential candidate. In January, Dole had introduced a bill requiring the President to unilaterally lift the arms embargo. The

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<sup>243</sup> Chollet, *The Road*, p. 10.

<sup>244</sup> Rohde, *Endgame*, p. 29.

<sup>245</sup> Holbrooke, *To End*, p. 68.

<sup>246</sup> Bill Clinton, 'Remarks by the President at US Air Force Academy Graduation Ceremony,' 31 May 1995

[[http://clinton1.nara.gov/White\\_House/Publications/html/afacad.html](http://clinton1.nara.gov/White_House/Publications/html/afacad.html)] (accessed 20 August 2013).

Administration had opposed it. Now, Dole argued, the new policy was simply 'reinforcing failure.' The Bosnians should have been given the opportunity to defend themselves, by lifting the embargo.<sup>247</sup> Other quarters within the Administration were critical for the opposite reason. Dick Morris, long-time policy advisor to the President was shocked. The country, Morris argued, was largely against intervention and the President's ratings had dropped after his speech. He added:

You don't want to be Lyndon Johnson...sacrificing your potential for doing good on the domestic front, by a destructive, never-ending foreign involvement.<sup>248</sup>

The ever-cautious Christopher similarly opposed the shift, as he had opposed Lake's earlier proposals for a change of policy.<sup>249</sup> With his statement backfiring, Clinton retreated. The US would intervene only in a 'remote and unlikely' emergency extraction.<sup>250</sup> Clinton had, once again, appeared weak. His policy had changed at the first sign of opposition. Congress continued its assault on the Administration, trying to pass bills to lift the arms embargo. 'We were getting more and more votes' to lift the embargo, 'every time there would be a vote we were a bit stronger,' Senator Dole recalled.<sup>251</sup> Congress' requests for a lift were largely political posturing. Once the debate moved on to what to do after the lifting of the embargo, no one had clear answers.<sup>252</sup> Congress' inconsistent position had also been demonstrated by the refusal to pay for the RRF, re-named by Biden 'Rapid Ripoff' force.<sup>253</sup> Still what mattered was the appearance of Congress' activism and of Clinton's weakness.

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<sup>247</sup> *The New York Times*, 'Excerpts From Dole's Statement,' 1 June 1995.

<sup>248</sup> Dick Morris, *Behind the Oval Office* (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 253.

<sup>249</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 90.

<sup>250</sup> Bill Clinton, 'Radio Address,' 3 June 1995

[[www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=51446#axzz1x6P59Bmx](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=51446#axzz1x6P59Bmx)] (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>251</sup> Senator R. Dole, Interview with the author, 25 July 2012, Washington.

<sup>252</sup> David Rieff, *Slaughterhouse* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), p. 155.

<sup>253</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 50-51.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June, the House inserted the lifting of the arms embargo in a foreign aid bill that the President had already promised to veto for other reasons, and approved it by a veto-proof majority of 318-99. The Administration had largely ignored other non-binding votes on lifting the embargo, but this time, the bill's sponsors contended that the vote would have been binding if also approved by the Senate.<sup>254</sup> Clinton risked a major embarrassment.<sup>255</sup> Bosnia was 'becoming a cancer on Clinton's entire foreign policy – spreading and eating away at its credibility'.<sup>256</sup>

The efforts to develop a new policy in the spring had failed. Now, Lake and others realised that the muddling through and the short-term measures that had been characterising the Administration's behaviour were affecting its position, both at home and abroad. In particular, the need to maintain harmony within NATO was damaging the Administration. 'The need for us to protect and preserve the alliance is driving our policy,' Vice-President Gore exploded, 'It is driving us into a brick wall with Congress.'<sup>257</sup> It could be added that the policy had also been disastrous on the ground. And yet, the Administration could not abandon its inaction. As Lake acknowledged, the Administration needed leverage over the parties.<sup>258</sup> Developments on the ground provided the leverage needed. Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> of July, the Bosnia Serbs overran the 'safe area' of Srebrenica. The reaction of the international community and of the UN forces in Srebrenica was disastrous. The crimes committed in the area reached shocking peaks of brutality: rape, abuse of civilians, and the massacre of approximately 7000 Muslim boys and men.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Paul Richter and Art Pine, 'Rescue in the Balkans,' *Los Angeles Times*, 9 June 1995 [[http://articles.latimes.com/1995-06-09/news/mn-11174\\_1\\_rapid-reaction-force](http://articles.latimes.com/1995-06-09/news/mn-11174_1_rapid-reaction-force)] (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>255</sup> Elizabeth Drew, *Showdown* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 249.

<sup>256</sup> Bob Woodward, *The Choice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 253.

<sup>257</sup> Woodward, *The Choice*, p. 255.

<sup>258</sup> Daalder, *Getting*, p. 91.

<sup>259</sup> Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*: 16-19. See footage of the meeting between the Dutch peacekeepers and Serb General Ratko Mladic in Srebrenica.

## 7.4 CONCLUSION

With the Srebrenica massacre and with the delicate political situation at home, all the risks that Clinton had tried to manage in two years of short-term, minimalist and half-hearted measures proverbially came back to haunt him. Srebrenica represented *the* crisis for the US in the Bosnia conflict, the real moment for decision. Domestically, as evidence of the massacre accumulated, criticism of the Administration skyrocketed, as did Congress' requests for a lift of the embargo. Gingrich went on the record suggesting that Srebrenica had been 'the worst humiliation for Western democracies since the 1930s.'<sup>260</sup> Dole saw in this further humiliation a key chance to attack Clinton's record in foreign policy and on the Bosnia failure.<sup>261</sup> *The Washington Post* defined the Administration as a 'big mouth, no stick' Administration. The critics of the Administration now included all the most prominent US journalists, and Washington heavyweights such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft.<sup>262</sup> Public uproar at the massacre now seeped through the decision-making process. In a meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, Vice President Gore built on the 'public opinion argument'. Debating a gruesome picture on the front-page of the *New York Times*, he stated:

My 21-year-old daughter asked about that picture...What am I supposed to tell her? Why is this happening and we're not doing anything?<sup>263</sup>

In terms of public attitudes, the Bosnia issue represented not so much an explicit threat to Clinton's re-election, but a more subtle, long-term risk:

Bosnia was not an issue in and of itself. Not many Americans were likely to go to the polls in the 1996 Presidential elections and vote one way or another because of events in Sarajevo or

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[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zrko02jIGQ>] (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>260</sup> Holbrooke, *To End*, p. 70.

<sup>261</sup> Power, *'A Problem'*, p. 425-426.

<sup>262</sup> Power, *'A Problem'*, p. 430-432.

<sup>263</sup> Douglas Foyle, *Counting the Public in* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 250.

Srebrenica. Rather its importance was more complicated than that, for it appeared to suggest something larger and far more devastating, an impotence on the part of the Clinton Administration not just in this but in all matters.<sup>264</sup>

Ironically, Clinton would be failing the 'voting booth' test of Presidential leadership that had convinced him to be tough on Bosnia when he was running for President. Furthermore, the allies shared the impression that the Administration was weak. Many of the measures taken by Clinton had been aimed at preserving NATO and, more generally, harmony among great powers. The humiliation from the massacre at Srebrenica now fatally threatened the credibility of NATO, and US leadership. The allies kept threatening that without a new, full US commitment they would withdraw their troops from UNPROFOR. The possibility of a withdrawal and the ensuing implementation of OPLAN 40104, now represented a ticking time-bomb for Clinton. The President realised that he had to do something, and fast, otherwise UNPROFOR withdrawal and the deployment of US troops would be 'dropped in during the middle of the campaign.'<sup>265</sup>

The Administration developed a new policy, building on a French proposal, threatening massive air strikes - no longer contained by the 'dual-key' arrangement - if Serbs attacked, and confirmed their new commitment in an emergency Conference in London. Furthermore, the Administration, with Anthony Lake at the forefront, was now fully engaged in drafting a new 'endgame strategy' for the war in Bosnia. Plans to end the war were already on the table when the Serbs decided to test NATO's newfound willingness by bombing the Sarajevo marketplace. NATO airstrikes followed. As the political risks of inaction had increased, the strategic risks of action seemed to decrease. The Croats launched a massive campaign to retake the Krajina region, creating the worst episode of ethnic cleansing of the whole war. What was important for the Administration was that the Bosnian Serbs had been dramatically defeated and that Milosevic had not helped them. As Christopher suggested, this gave rise to a new 'strategic situation' beneficial

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<sup>264</sup> Halberstam, *War*, p. 298.

<sup>265</sup> Power, *'A Problem'*, p. 424.

to the US.<sup>266</sup> No major obstacle remained to full US involvement. Richard Holbrooke would soon take the lead in the negotiations.<sup>267</sup>

In line with the first hypothesis of the thesis, the chapter started with a discussion of the general uncertainty surrounding the use of American power and the US role in the international context of the early 1990s. Uncertainty also played an 'active' part in the decision-making process as Clinton confronted the impossibility of knowing the extent of Serbian and, above all, Russian reactions to US measures in Bosnia. Furthermore, the analysis also identified how President Clinton and many of his advisers discussed US actions in Bosnia in terms of what could go wrong both strategically (on the ground and in the relation with European allies and Russia) and at home.

Strengthening the validity of the second hypothesis, the chapter has elaborated on the 'containment' thesis. Focusing on the 'containment' years, the chapter has shown the trade-offs involved in Clinton's policies, and, with them, the minimalism and short-termism that characterized American actions. Strong campaign pledges were made, mainly, to pass the 'voting booth' test, with a total disregard for the consequences on the ground and for the future of the Administration. Campaign pledges of a strong stand affected the Administration's approach to the VOPP. The President could not appear to be making concessions to the Serbs (although this was certainly not the aim of the VOPP). The decision to rule out the use of ground troops and the 'lift and strike' proposal worked for Clinton domestically as they placated the 'do something' impulse, but strained relations with allies and had no visible effect on the ground. From there, the Administration moved to a series of measures that had more to do with harmony among great powers, than with the conflict, including the dreadful 'safe areas' compromise. The establishment of the Contact Group confirmed this trend.

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<sup>266</sup> Danner, 'Operation.'

<sup>267</sup> Derek Chollet and Samantha Power, *The Unquiet American* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

Until the Srebrenica massacre, the Administration coupled strong rhetoric and strong stands at home, such as the decision to end the enforcement of the embargo, with measures to placate allies' concerns regarding US activism. Bosnia was left on its own until violence reached unprecedented peaks in the summer of 1995. In line with Lamborn's prediction and with the sub-hypothesis identified in **Chapter 3**, several choices of the Clinton Administration demonstrated a propensity to give priority to short-term political risk over longer-term strategic risks.

Finally, the account is also consistent with the understanding of foreign policy crises and with the third hypothesis brought forward by this project. The chapter has interpreted Srebrenica as 'the' crisis within the Bosnia war and first-hand accounts confirm this interpretation.<sup>268</sup> In explaining the origins of this crisis, however, the chapter has not been limited to a circumscribed and well-defined 'pre-crisis' period. It has expanded the horizon on the whole Bosnia issue and has tried to demonstrate how the accumulation of short-term measures, and, above all, of 'countervailing risks' contributed to the peak of violence in 1995. As David Gompert suggested, the break-up of Yugoslavia and the war in Bosnia were probably inevitable; but 'it took bad policy – on top of bad policy' to bring the situation to 'such a tragic juncture.'<sup>269</sup>

In this sense, the analysis of the Clinton Administration's Bosnia policy conforms to the several accounts offered in the sociological risk literature. Uncertainty, risks and short-term measures prevailed in the post-Cold War environment. More importantly, however, within this project, this analysis constitutes only the final building block of a broader argument. Uncertainty, risks and short-term measures prevailed in the post-Cold War world, as they did in the Cold War one. **Chapter 8** will conclude the thesis summarising the main argument, identifying the contributions made by the

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<sup>268</sup> Gallucci, Interview with the author.

<sup>269</sup> Gompert, 'The United States,' in Ullman (Ed.), *The world and Yugoslavia's war*, p. 140.



thesis and the possible objections to it, and pointing towards future avenues of research.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUDING CHAPTER

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

*And yet, a more rigorous examination of the past  
might reveal that what we sense as new really is not,  
and that some of the “traditional” features  
are more complex than we think<sup>1</sup>.  
Stanley Hoffman.*

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2013, President Barack Obama gave a speech on the United States’ drone policy. The speech extended beyond targeted killings to give an overview of the future of the ‘War on Terror,’ and of United States policy against terrorism. Quoting James Madison, Obama warned that the United States should not allow war to define its national character. This war, the President made clear, ‘like all wars must end.’ Answering a question from the audience, the President stated:

We have faced down dangers far greater than al Qaeda...we have overcome slavery and Civil War; fascism and communism... these events could not come close to breaking us.<sup>2</sup>

As James Fallows suggested, this position seemed like a breath of fresh air. For the first time in years, the terrorist threat had been put into historical perspective, and the President seemed to suggest that the US could live with the risk of terrorism.<sup>3</sup> Lack of perspective was one of the main springboards for this research project.

My project aimed at gauging whether the nature of US foreign policy decision-making had changed - after the Cold War and after 9/11 – as radically as a large body of literature seemed to suggest. It aimed at

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hoffman, ‘An American Social Science: International Relations,’ *Daedalus*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (Summer, 1977), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> James Fallows, ‘What Mattered in Obama’s Speech Today: Ending the Open-Ended “War on Terror,”’ *The Atlantic*, 23 May 2013, [<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/05/what-mattered-in-obamas-speech-today-ending-the-open-ended-war-on-terror/276208/>] (accessed 22 August 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Fallows, ‘What Mattered.’

evaluating the assessment that the Cold War world represented a certain, clear and secure world that had nothing to do with the uncertain, unpredictable and risky post-Cold War one. It soon became clear that, to achieve these aims, the research had to take a long detour. The questions, in fact, did not develop in a vacuum, but represented a reaction to a particular type of literature. Several studies published in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War, identified the predominance of risk and uncertainty as radically new features of international politics. Hence, to answer the original questions, it became necessary to tackle risk, uncertainty and the 'risk literature.' The research found weaknesses in the treatment of risk provided by several schools inspired by sociology and decision theory, and proceeded to suggest a reconceptualisation. With risk and uncertainty clearly defined, the thesis argued that foreign policy decision-making could be interpreted as a particular form of risk management. The research developed three main hypotheses that, if verified would suggest continuities in the nature and practice of foreign policy decision-making. The development of hypotheses and the study of risk, in other words, helped the thesis reach its original destination.

This concluding chapter reflects on the research journey. It can be divided into four main parts. **Part two** will discuss the risk literature, and the emergence of the research hypotheses. **Part three** will provide a summary of how the research hypotheses performed in the case studies. **Part four** will identify the contributions this research makes, and the potential objections to the thesis. **Part five** will briefly suggest avenues for further research.

## 8.2 RISK AND RISK MANAGEMENT IN FOREIGN POLICY

### 8.2.1 Risk in IR: sociology and decision theory

In the book *Managing Strategic Surprise*, Paul Bracken *et al.* wrote that ‘thinking systematically about risk’ has ‘barely touched the world of national security and international affairs.’<sup>4</sup> When this research started, the assessment seemed paradoxical. Risk seemed at the centre of a rich IR scholarship. Although other divisions have been suggested,<sup>5</sup> **Chapter 2** divided this recent ‘risk literature’ into two main sections: the ‘risk society at war scholarship’ inspired by Ulrich Beck’s theory of ‘risk society,’ and the ‘governmentality at war’ scholarship, inspired by Michel Foucault’s work on security and by governmentality studies.<sup>6</sup> The analysis discussed the origins and the main tenets of these scholarships separately, but it also pointed out weaknesses and common elements. In particular, the analysis suggested that these two scholarships share three main propositions.

First, they both identify the presence of a historical divide. This divide is signposted by the rise to prominence of risk and uncertainty. For ‘governmentality scholars,’ 9/11 and the radical uncertainty of terrorism brought a radicalisation of neo-liberal practices of government aimed at extending governmental control over society, both within and without a state’s borders.<sup>7</sup> For the Beckian scholarship, 9/11 represented only the latest manifestation of a longer process. The real change, these scholars

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Bracken, Ian Bremmer, and David Gordon (Eds.), *Managing Strategic Surprise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> William Clapton, ‘Risk in International Relations,’ *International Relations*, Vol. 25 (2011), pp. 280-295; and Karen Lund Petersen, ‘Risk analysis – a field within security studies?,’ *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 18, no. 4 (December 2012), pp. 693-717

<sup>6</sup> For a similar division see the *Review of International Studies*, Volume 37, No. 5 (December 2011). Tanja Aalberts and Wouter Wener, ‘Mobilising Uncertainty,’ pp. 2183-2200, and Filip Gelev, ‘Checks and balances of risk management: precautionary logic and the judiciary,’ pp. 2237-2252.

<sup>7</sup> Louise Amoore and Mareike De Goede, *Risk and the War on Terror* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 6; and Claudia Aradau and Rens Van Munster, ‘Taming the future: the dispositif of risk in the War on Terror,’ in Amoore and De Goede, *Risk and the War on Terror*, p. 24.

argued, occurred with the end of the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> Beckian scholars such as Christopher Coker, Mikkel Rasmussen, and Yee-Kuang Heng argued that the end of the Cold War brought with it the demise of clear threats, substituted by unpredictable risks.<sup>9</sup>

Second, these schools suggest that with the new predominance of risk, governments have adopted new practices to deal with them. The rise of risk was accompanied by the rise of risk management. To be sure, the two schools differ in their interpretation of risk management. For scholars of Foucauldian inspiration, practices of risk management are the best strategies decision-makers can adopt to extend governments' control over society and to reproduce neoliberal rationalities of government. For Beckian scholars, on the other hand, risk management becomes the only strategy decision-makers can adopt. They need to abandon long-term strategies and dreams of establishing 'new world orders,' and should aim at preventing the spread of risks.<sup>10</sup>

From this account, the third element should be clear. In line with similar studies on the 'risk citizen,'<sup>11</sup> the analysis extrapolated from these literatures the key features of the 'risk foreign policy decision-maker.' The analysis suggested that these schools share an extreme (albeit radically opposed) view of decision-makers and of their possibilities of control over the environment, and over the consequences of their own actions. The decision-maker of the 'risk society at war' seems almost powerless. The reasons behind this lack of control are: the sheer unpredictability of risks, the thick layer of uncertainty surrounding decision-making in the post-Cold

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher Coker, *War in an Age of Risk* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> See in particular Coker, *War*, Mikkel V. Rasmussen, *The Risk society at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Yee-Kuang Heng, *War as risk management* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Rasmussen, *The Risk*, p. 35; and Heng, *War*, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Sandra Walklate and Gabriel Mythen, 'Agency, reflexivity and risk: cosmopolitan, neurotic or prudential citizen?' *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 2010, pp. 46-62.

War world, and the presence of what Beck called 'boomerang effects' – efforts to control risks that come back to haunt the centres of decision.<sup>12</sup> In the Foucauldian scholarship (admittedly more orientated to domestic policies),<sup>13</sup> the foreign policy decision-maker seems in almost total control. He adopts, in foreign policy, the same strategies of pre-emption, control, and violence that he adopts in the domestic context.<sup>14</sup>

The analysis found these three propositions unsatisfactory. The search for clarity as to the role of risk in decision-making started from other treatments of the same concepts available in the literature. The analysis suggested that, although the 'sociological' interpretation of risk was relatively new, risk had been at the centre of several studies drawing on economic or psychological perspectives. As we have seen, these authors relied on insights as varied as Bernoulli's expected utility theory,<sup>15</sup> prospect theory,<sup>16</sup> a combination of prospect theory and other IR literatures,<sup>17</sup> and a combination of works on risk and foreign policy decision-making literature.<sup>18</sup> Two new problems emerged. First, the literature discussed risk only in term of risk-taking: risk-aversion or risk-propensity. Second, the effort to translate the laboratory findings of the psychological literature into a foreign policy decision-making context led to an excessively aseptic account. We have observed how this type of analysis completely dismissed the role of domestic politics and other constraints that could limit a foreign

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<sup>12</sup> Coker, *War*, p. 132.

<sup>13</sup> Amoore and De Goede, *Risk*, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> See among many Larner, 'Spatial,' Brian Massumi, 'Potential Politics and the Primacy of Preemption,' *Theory and Event*, 2007, Vol. 10, No. 2 [[http://muse.jhu.edu.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v010/10.2massumi.html](http://muse.jhu.edu.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/journals/theory_and_event/v010/10.2massumi.html)] (accessed 21 August 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Hannes Adomeit, *Soviet Risk-taking and Crisis Behavior* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Rose McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1998), and William A. Boettcher III, *Presidential Risk Behavior in Foreign Policy: Prudence or Peril* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); and

<sup>17</sup> Boettcher, *Presidential*; and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Yacoov Vertzberger, *Risk Taking and Decisionmaking: Foreign Military Intervention decisions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

policy-decision-maker's risk-taking freedom. Most of these studies dealt with US foreign policy and correctly focused on the President as the ultimate decision-maker, but portrayed him as completely free to make decisions, with no constraints imposed by strategic pressure, domestic politics, public opinion, or domestic criticism.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the 'risk-taking' decision-maker did not appear more realistic than the 'Beckian' or 'Foucauldian' one.

At the end of this review, the analysis concluded that the three bodies of literature discussed provided neither satisfactory definitions, nor realistic accounts of risk, uncertainty, risk management, and of their role in foreign policy. In particular, four issues seemed to need specific attention: a definition of the concepts and role of risk and uncertainty, a definition of risk management, suggestions on how it could be relevant for foreign policy, and a more realistic image of the decision-maker. **Chapter 3** proceeded to tackle these issues blending foreign policy decision-making texts, and insights from outside the international politics literature.

### **8.2.2 Two worlds collide: risk management and foreign policy**

Having discussed the contrasting and contradictory definitions of risk present in the sociological and in the decision theory literatures, the first aim of **Chapter 3** was to provide definitions of these concepts. The process was divided into two main parts. The first part discussed several authors within the foreign policy decision-making literature, developing 'hints' on how risk, uncertainty, risk management and control work in foreign policy. The first step was identifying the roles of risk and uncertainty. Here, Thomas Schelling's work on the strategy of conflict made clear how, even though decision-makers can take risks; they are far from having total control. Risk and uncertainty coexist. In any situation, the 'fact of

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<sup>19</sup> Boettcher, *Presidential*, and McDermott, *Risk-Taking*.

uncertainty' remains.<sup>20</sup> Second, the analysis moved closer to the study of US Presidential decision-making. This step, as **Chapters 3 and 4** made clear, was taken since the analysis had to confront the sociological risk literature, and the risk-taking literature, on their own turfs. These scholarships, in fact, drew conclusions for US foreign policy (sociological studies), and mostly discussed risk-taking as 'Presidential risk-taking' ('decision theory' studies). Richard Neustadt's work on Presidential power highlighted the short-termism, minimalism, and lack of control inherent in Presidential decision-making.<sup>21</sup> To understand this process, the analysis looked more closely at the nature of decision-making. Alan Lamborn provided an interpretation of the objects of the foreign policy trade-off. In particular, he suggested that decision-making could be interpreted as a 'balance' between political risks (the need to maintain domestic consensus), and policy (or strategic) risks (the risks inherent in the policy chosen). Lamborn suggested that the two dimensions are contingent. Foreign policy cannot be understood without taking both into account.<sup>22</sup> More specifically, he argued that, in this balancing act, decision-makers put a premium on managing short-term political risks, since political consequences appear clearer than strategic ones. Although Lamborn's analysis concerned European decision-makers, the chapter confirmed its applicability to US Presidents. Alexander George similarly argued that Presidents are constrained by the need to achieve contrasting goals: optimising resources, gaining consensus, and improving decisions' quality. This compels Presidents to accept trade-offs.<sup>23</sup>

From the study of these authors, it became clear that risk, uncertainty, short-termism and control are traditional concerns of the foreign policy literature; and, more importantly, of foreign policy decision-making itself.

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 94.

<sup>21</sup> Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), p. 212.

<sup>22</sup> Robert G. Kaufman, 'Book reviews: Statecraft, Domestic Politics, and Foreign Policy Making,' *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 51 (1989), pp. 790-794.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander George, *Presidential Decision-making in Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980).



Before proceeding to forge an explicit link, the second section tried to bring clarity as to the concepts involved in the discussion. The analysis accepted the 'contested nature' of the concepts of risk and uncertainty,<sup>24</sup> but tried to provide operational definitions. Starting from Frank Knight<sup>25</sup> and John Maynard Keynes<sup>26</sup> the analysis identified uncertainty as the overarching principle of international politics. It suggested that uncertainty comes from lack of knowledge, from impossibility of knowing, and from impossibility of controlling the consequences of one's own action. It also suggested, however, that, when approaching uncertainty, decision-makers treat it as if their actions were supported by a set of probabilities. As Knight put it, decision-makers act on the basis of judgments that can be interpreted as 'an opinion of probability.'<sup>27</sup> In doing this, Keynes concurred, they ignore the 'awkward fact'<sup>28</sup> that they don't know. These efforts to control and to manage risks needed to confront the possibility of failure due to irreducible uncertainty.<sup>29</sup> This point led to the definition of risk.

The analysis, once again, agreed with Frank Knight's insight that risks are a matter of probability, but it also updated the definition of risk to bring it in line with risk management studies and, more generally, with common sense. The analysis suggested that risk implies a specific probability: the probability of negative outcome coupled with the extent of the damage. As Douglas Hubbard put it, risk means that 'something bad could happen.'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Heng, War, and Brian C. Rathbun, 'Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the multiple meanings of a crucial concept in International Relations Theory,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51 (2007), pp. 533-557.

<sup>25</sup> Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Cambridge: Mifflin and Company, 1921).

<sup>26</sup> John Maynard Keynes, 'The General Theory of Employment,' *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Feb. 1937), pp. 209-223.

<sup>27</sup> Knight, *Risk*, p. 237.

<sup>28</sup> Keynes, 'The General,' p. 214.

<sup>29</sup> Sanjay G. Reddy, 'Claims to expert knowledge and the subversion of democracy: the triumph of risk over uncertainty,' *Economy and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (May 1996), p. 227.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Hubbard, *The Failure of Risk Management: why it's broken and how to fix it* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), p. 8.

The analysis also stressed the point - common in the literature - that risks depend on decisions in two main ways. First, there would be no risk if the future were predetermined.<sup>31</sup> Second, risks are a matter of decision; hence, they are both real and constructed. They represent 'something out there' (the probability and magnitude of a negative event), but they also depend on a decision-maker's 'definition of the situation' (the 'opinion of probability'). Finally, building on Hubbard, Heng, and others,<sup>32</sup> the analysis provided a definition of risk management as a process of identification, assessment and prioritisation, in which resources are managed to minimise and control the occurrence and impact of adverse events.<sup>33</sup> This definition recognises that it is not an instrument to solve problems, but to contain them, to minimise risks given resource constraints. In a nutshell, it is an effort to 'be smart when taking chances.'<sup>34</sup>

Adapting risk management to foreign policy decision-making, then, meant discussing which chances Presidents take and which constraints they face. For this reason, building on Lamborn and George's insights, the analysis has suggested that Presidential decision-making cannot be reduced to risk management, but is a matter of trade-offs. Presidents, like decision-makers in many other contexts, rarely confront 'risk free' alternatives. For each decision, Presidents confront risk-risk situations, or 'risk vs. risk trade-offs.' Since foreign policy occurs at 'the point where all the lines of communication and pressure, foreign and domestic, intersect,'<sup>35</sup> this analysis has divided foreign policy risk into political risks (probability of adverse domestic political consequences) and strategic risks (probability of

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<sup>31</sup> David Garland, 'The Rise of Risk,' in Richard V. Ericson and Aaron Doyle (Eds.), *Risk and Morality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Hood and David K. C. Jones (Eds.), *Accidents and design: contemporary debates in risk management* (London: Routledge 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Hubbard, *The Failure*, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Hubbard, *The Failure*, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> David Vital, 'The Problem,' in James Barber and Michael Smith (Eds.), *The Nature of Foreign policy: a reader* (Edinburgh: Holmes McDougall, 1974), p. 21.

adverse international consequences).<sup>36</sup> In line with the 'risk vs. risk trade-offs' framework, developed by John Graham and Jonathan Wiener, the analysis has argued that Presidents often face situations in which measures to manage a 'target risk,' dismiss or ignore 'countervailing risks.' More specifically, following the hypothesis brought forward by Alan Lamborn,<sup>37</sup> the analysis also argued that Presidents often select strategically riskier alternatives if they assume they are able to manage domestic political risks.

Only one issue remained: finding the ideal context to explore these. In other words, the research still needed to answer two related questions: which case studies, and case studies of what? The first question was easily answered, and the reasons for the selection were explained in **Chapter 4**. In particular, the selection of the case studies responded to a historical necessity. Since the main aim of the thesis is to show continuity along the Cold War/Post-Cold War divide, the thesis needed three different case studies, from three different historical contexts. For this reason the case studies are placed at the peak of the Cold War (Kennedy and Cuba); during a more complex international phase (Carter and Iran); and in the post-Cold War world (Clinton and Bosnia). For the second question, the analysis interpreted foreign policy crises as instances of 'lack of control.' On this point, the research has aligned itself with more recent works. These studies have gone beyond the traditional interpretation of crises as clearly circumscribed events, suggesting that crises do not explode in an identifiable pre-crisis period. Crises are like diseases, whose pathogens are spreading in the body long before the first symptoms emerge.<sup>38</sup> This research added that these 'pathogens' can be interpreted as the accumulation of 'countervailing risks.'

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<sup>36</sup> John D. Graham and Jonathan B. Wiener (Eds.) (1995), *Risk versus Risk*, Harvard University Press, London.

<sup>37</sup> Alan C. Lamborn, *The Price of Power* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart, Eric Stern and Bengt Sundelius, *The Politics of Crisis Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 19.

With these final points, the research had come full circle. It identified the reasons for the divide in the presence of risk, uncertainty, and risk management. It suggested that these factors led to a particular understanding of decision-makers' extent of control. It tried, and failed, to find answers in the risk-taking literature, emerging with an unrealistic interpretation of decision-making. For this reason, it proceeded to analyse how these factors had been discussed in traditional foreign policy literature. It gave clear definitions for the concepts at the centre of the analysis, and identified Presidential decision-making as a specific type of risk management. Finally, it identified a context in which the relevance of risk, uncertainty and risk management, and decision-makers' extent of control, could be tested.

At the end of this long detour, these conclusions were summarised in three research hypotheses, or 'thematic schema'<sup>39</sup> that drove the discussion in the case studies:

- 1) Risk and uncertainty have always co-existed. They do not identify different types of objects, or different historical eras. Whereas uncertainty represents the dominant condition of international politics, decision-makers approach foreign policy issues in terms of the risks: in terms of probability, and in terms of what could go wrong.
- 2) Foreign policy decision-making can be interpreted a form of risk management, more specifically, of 'risk vs. risk' trade-off in which political risks and strategic risks are managed.
  - a) In the management process three features prevail: minimalism, short-termism, and recognition that threats cannot be 'eliminated,' but only managed.
  - b) Presidents are willing to select strategically riskier options in the hope to manage domestic political risks.
- 3) Lack of control represents a natural feature of foreign policy decision-making. Short-termism and minimalism play a key role in Presidents' lack of control, leading to the emergence of failure.

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<sup>39</sup> Heng, *War*, p. 59.

The main assumption was that, if these hypotheses were verified, the reasons for understanding risk, uncertainty and risk management as radically new would be questioned. More broadly, the presence of a radical Cold War/Post-Cold War or post-9/11 divide in the nature of foreign policy decision-making would be questioned. The next section of this chapter will deal with how the hypotheses performed in the case studies.

### **8.3 THE HYPOTHESES AND THE CASE STUDIES**

#### **8.3.1 Uncertainty and risk: a President's predicament**

For the first hypothesis, each case study discussed the President's predicament as he took office, and the interplay between the prevailing uncertainty and issue-specific risks. The Kennedy Administration provided, in this sense, the hardest test. Authors arguing for a Cold War of knowledge and certainty could, in fact, point to the absence of almost any uncertainty in terms of Soviet nuclear forces. The 'missile gap' was more an 'electoral card' than a real concern. As the research has shown, however, the Cold War was much more than counting Soviet missiles. Soviet capabilities were not the only concern. Soviet intentions in strategic hotspots such as Laos, Cuba and Berlin remained unknown to US policy-makers. In particular, a thick layer of uncertainty remained regarding Soviet support for Third World movements and wars of national liberation that could imperil US interests.<sup>40</sup> In Kennedy's policy towards Cuba, the deep uncertainty regarding Soviet moves and the possibility and locus of a Soviet reaction remained one of the main concerns, limiting freedom of choice. Furthermore, the trick regarding the deployment of the missiles played by KGB agent Georgi Bolshakov on Robert Kennedy stands as a reminder that US foreign policy decision-makers did not know Soviet intentions, even when they thought they did.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Alex Von Tunzelmann, *Red Heat: conspiracy, murder and the Cold War in the Caribbean* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Andrew, *For the President's eyes only* (London: Harper and Collins, 1995), p. 278.

For the Carter Administration, uncertainty prevailed in two main contexts. First, and only touched upon in the analysis, the Carter Administration was unsure about Soviet intentions in the Third World, and faced an increasingly complex domestic agenda. Second, and key in the analysis, the Carter Administration was not only incapable of gathering the right information and the right answers in Iran; but also unable to ask the correct questions. The reduction of intelligence personnel, the predominance of Cold War concerns and the need to maintain the Shah as a 'happy ally,' made of Iran a black hole. Complete uncertainty remained as to internal developments, up until the start of the Revolution. When the Revolution succeeded complete uncertainty remained as to the intentions of the new government. As the analysis made clear, US intelligence, and hence decision-makers, had no understanding of Khomeini; even if they did, it would have been impossible for the US to predict the Ayatollah's intentions.<sup>42</sup>

In line with 'risk society at war' accounts, the uncertainty confronted by the Clinton Administration related to the absence of a specific enemy in the post-Cold War world. In the first post-Cold War Presidency, scholars, politicians and institutions debated the role of the United States and of American power. However, uncertainty also related to the confrontation in the Balkans and to the impossibility of knowing future Serbian moves, and possible Russian reactions to US policies. To be sure, the analysis is not suggesting that the three types of uncertainty are identical, but that in the three contexts, 'known unknowns,' and 'unknown unknowns' co-existed.

Moving from the general uncertainty to specific foreign policy issues, the analysis has demonstrated how risk becomes the key variable. The case studies have shown that in dealing with foreign policy issues, Presidents look at the future impact of their choices, both in domestic/political and strategic terms. They 'want to know what's the best and worst that could

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew, *For the President's eyes only*, p. 442.

happen,' and 'what are the consequences of different actions.' This means reasoning in terms of risk and risk management.<sup>43</sup>

In the cases analysed, the acknowledgment of risk - of the probability of something going wrong depending on the decision taken - was often explicit. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. warned President Kennedy that the Bay of Pigs posed both political risks for the Administration, alongside the military risks. Robert Kennedy and Richard Goodwin argued for Operation Mongoose and for the harassment of Cuba as a 'risk-free' operation. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara tried to convince the President that any statement on the Soviet build-up in Cuba, posed serious long-term risks.

For the Carter Administration, a reduction in weapons sales to the Shah, and the commitment to human rights were understood as posing risk to the US-Iran alliance. Officials in Tehran were instructed to limit contacts with the opposition as these might pose risks to the friendship with the Shah, and to US Cold War interests; that is, to the possibility of spying on the Soviet Union from bases in Iranian territory. As the Revolution got under way, various options were considered in terms of the risk they posed to the future of the Shah and to the US position in the region, and in terms of the risks of a possible Soviet reaction. Finally, the admission of the Shah was clearly understood as posing two separate sets of risks. Risks for the Administration's relation with the Revolutionary government and for the Americans in Iran were counter-balanced by domestic political risks for the Administration and possibly by risks to Carter's political agenda.

In Bosnia, the Clinton Administration constantly confronted three main sets of risks. Domestic political risks often came from President Clinton's strong postures at home and equally glaring retreats. Strategic risks came from both the conflagration in the Balkans, and from great power politics between the US, Europe, and the Russian Federation. Several measures taken in Bosnia, including the cancellation of 'lift and strike,' the 'safe areas,'

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<sup>43</sup> Bracken *et al.*, *Managing*, p. 303.

and the Joint Action Plan (JAP), were interpreted in terms of the risks they posed to Clinton's domestic position, to relations with the European allies and Russia, to NATO, and (more rarely) to the position of the Bosnia Serbs and of the Bosnian Muslims.

### **8.3.2 Risk management and lack of control**

The second and third hypotheses are considered together as they can be understood as inter-linked. In a world of uncertainty, decision-makers confront risks. The way in which they manage risks affects their possibilities of control. The three Presidents analysed in the case studies showed a remarkable short-termism in their approach to foreign policy issues. Equally, they shared the recognition that the possibilities open to the United States were limited. The US could not solve once and for all the issues at hand without incurring unacceptable political or strategic risks. In line with a risk management framework, the problems faced were often contained and cyclically re-addressed. The end result was a series of short-term measures that had more to do with managing the risks of the moment than with shaping foreign policy development. As Richard Neustadt predicted, all the Presidents did was try to stop fires, but these fires often got out of control.<sup>44</sup>

Kennedy skilfully played the 'Cuba card' during the campaign to manage the risk of being outflanked from the right and accused of appeasement. As he took office, however, the strength of his posture translated into his inability or lack of will to stop the momentum behind the Bay of Pigs invasion. Political and strategic risks convinced the President to impose strict limitations on the invasion, but the President's minimalism did not pay off. After the catastrophic failure of the invasion, Kennedy certainly became obsessed with Castro, and with the need to get his revenge on the Cuban dictator. However, he also recognised the impossibility of an all-out effort against Cuba. A well-funded, but low level campaign of harassment and

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<sup>44</sup> Neustadt, *Presidential*, p. 131.



assassination attempts was conducted, in which hiding the US hand was as important as harming the Cuban dictator. In the aftermath of the Vienna Summit, the need to show strength led Kennedy to dismiss both Soviet sensibilities, and long-term risks inherent in his choices. Public rhetoric, a stepped up campaign against Cuba, unprecedented military exercises in the Caribbean, and the missiles in Turkey convinced Khrushchev that a confrontation was coming, whether in Cuba, or in other trouble spots. As the Soviet build-up in Cuba mounted, political risks and mounting domestic pressure convinced Kennedy to take a strong stand. The unwillingness to show the American hand and the need to avoid international embarrassment provided for contradictory choices. The President went on the record with strong statements against the build-up, the Pentagon carried out unprecedented military exercises aimed at Cuba, and the State Department, supported by National Security Advisor Bundy, decided to stop the over flights of Cuba, delaying the discovery of the missiles.

The Shah of Iran represented everything the Carter Administration wanted to change in US foreign policy: a dictator with an abysmal human rights record and an infinite appetite for US weapons. Dealing with Iran, Carter made only cosmetic changes to weapons sales and never really insisted on an improvement in the domestic political situation of Iran. These choices managed the risks to American Cold War interests inherent in 'disappointing' the monarch, but exacerbated the frustration of the awakening Iranian opposition. With the start of the Revolution, the Administration adopted a series of short-term measures aimed at reassuring the Shah of American support. Furthermore, President Carter repeatedly went on the record stating that the US was unwilling and unable to interfere with developments in Iran. US attempts at solving other countries' problems, Carter repeatedly stated, had been discredited in Vietnam. The only choice available was managing the risks coming from Iran and avoiding any escalation involving the Soviet Union. The Administration stubbornly refused to effect any change in its approach. As the Revolution peaked, US officials in Washington and in Tehran understood

that the Administration policies confronted two clear types of risks: 'sticking with the Shah' meant failing to position the US in line with a possible new government; opening to the opposition meant weakening an already disheartened Shah. The trade-off was epitomised by Washington's refusal to build on the contacts with members of the secular and religious opposition. Carter decided to stick with the Shah and the only US interventions – such as the delivery of anti-riot equipment and gasoline – sided with repression. Even after the Shah's departure the Administration maintained its minimal and short-term outlook supporting the hopeless Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar and refusing to take any strong stand. When the Revolutionary government took power, domestic political risks and a heated Washington context prevented Carter from openly extending a clear (and arguably desperate) olive branch to the new government. The admission of the Shah to New York represented only the last episode in which domestic political risks coming from pressure groups and from the possible damage to Carter's domestic agenda, led to the dismissal of the strategic risks for the Americans in Iran and of those inherent in a damaged relationship with the new government.

In the uncertainty of the post-Cold War world, the disintegration of the Balkans provided candidate Clinton with the perfect gap in the armour of the 'foreign policy President.' Clinton criticised the passive approach to the Balkans of the George H. W. Bush Administration. As officials on the candidate's campaign trail had made clear, a strong stand on Bosnia could show leadership and manage the risks posed by Clinton's foreign policy inexperience. To be sure, Bosnia played a minimal role in Clinton's victory, but, once in office, he was held accountable for his statements. Once again, however, a combination of strategic risks and domestic political risks meant that Bosnia was approached in haphazard fashion. Domestic accusations of appeasement prevented the Administration from accepting the plan devised by the UN and the EC. At the same time, the military's reluctance and the allies' warnings prevented any direct action against the Bosnian Serbs. 'Lift and strike' was dead even before reaching Europe. As the Bosnia war turned

brutal, the Administration changed its rhetoric, recognising US impotence and inability to solve the conflict. Bosnia became an intractable 'family feud,' a 'problem from hell.' The only thing Clinton could do was contain the conflict. The Administration accepted a series of short-term measures that, although maintaining relative harmony among the allies and with Russia, did little to ease the situation. The 'safe areas,' the JAP, and the establishment of the Contact Group left the situation on the field largely untouched and violence flared. In the summer of 1995, domestic political risks coming from the challenge posed by Bob Dole and by the Republican Party prevented the Administration from aligning its policies with the UN and from reaching an agreement with Serbian President Milosevic. It took the massacre at Srebrenica and a domestic assault on the Administration to finally change policy and show a longer-term commitment.

In line with the initial hypotheses, three elements emerge from a review of the case studies' findings. First, risk and uncertainty are key variables of foreign policy decision-making. Second, risk management and 'risk vs. risk' trade-offs provide a lens to interpret foreign policy decision-making. Third, lack of control is inherent in this management process. Short-termism, minimalism, and the accumulation of countervailing risks play a key role in the emergence of crises. To be sure, uncertainty and unpredictable consequences play a role, but, in line with the risk vs. risk trade-off framework, risks and multiple trade-offs are 'the crucial issue.'<sup>45</sup>

## **8.4 CONTRIBUTIONS AND POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS**

### **8.4.1 The targets: literatures and contributions**

Beyond the main purpose of questioning the existence of an historical divide, the contributions of this thesis can be understood in relation to the three main bodies of literature identified in **Chapters 2 and 3**: the

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<sup>45</sup> Jonathan B. Wiener, 'Precaution in a multirisk world,' in Dennis Paustenbach (Ed.), *Human and Ecological Risk assessment: theory and practice* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2002), p. 1519.

'sociological' approaches to risk, the 'risk-taking' literature, and the crisis literature. Furthermore, the analysis of the case studies also contributes to the literatures on the three US Administrations involved.

#### *8.4.1.1 The sociological literature: risk, uncertainty, and decision-making*

As we have seen, although discussing risk and uncertainty at length, Beckian and Foucauldian scholars failed to give precise definitions. Beck defines risk carelessly as the probability of a negative event, as the negative event in itself, or as a strategy to deal with the negative event. Beckian scholars use definitions such as 'flows,' or 'scenarios';<sup>46</sup> interpreting risks sometimes as realities, sometimes as 'beliefs.'<sup>47</sup> Foucauldian scholars seem equally unsure whether risks are a mediated product of something out there, or more generally 'dispositifs,' 'assemblages' to deal with danger.<sup>48</sup> The concept of uncertainty is equally blurred. The governmentality scholarship does not elaborate much on the concept. It limits the analysis to the assumption that uncertainty depends on the 'infinity' – too small to be prevented, too big to be contained/insured against – of contemporary risks.<sup>49</sup> More often, uncertainty is interpreted simply as a pretext to extend practices of control. Coker and Rasmussen understand uncertainty as the overarching principle of international politics. Even here, however, a certain dose of confusion seems to reign. Christopher Coker's *Age of Risk*, looks remarkably like an 'age of uncertainty.' As we have seen, these scholars argue that the predominance of uncertainty represent a recent development.

Finally, risk management is equally ill defined. Most scholars identify some characteristics of risk management without going into much detail on what risk management means, or on what risks decision-makers are called upon

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<sup>46</sup> Rasmussen, *The Risk*, pp. 2 and 4.

<sup>47</sup> Coker, *War*, pp. 66 and 142.

<sup>48</sup> Ammore and De Goede, *Risk*.

<sup>49</sup> Francois Ewald, 'Two Infinities of Risk,' in Brian Massumi (Ed.), *The Politics of Everyday Fear* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

to manage.<sup>50</sup> Some, such as Rasmussen alternate between the suggestion to adopt risk management strategies, and more vague suggestions that strategists should behave like meteorologists.<sup>51</sup> The present analysis gives precise meanings to these concepts, establishing boundaries, and distinctions.

This work on reconceptualisation, however, is not an end in itself. Achieving clarity as to the meaning of risk, uncertainty and risk management helped the thesis achieve two main goals. The analysis made clear how these concepts have always played a leading role in foreign policy decision-making. Decision-makers - in this case Presidents – have always confronted uncertainty; have always managed the risks posed by foreign policy issues; and have often been undermined by the short-termism of their choices and by unpredictable or unexpected consequences of their own action. Equally, the work of redefinition and the discussion of the case studies in terms of risk management have helped in casting doubt on the two radical views of the decision-maker provided by the Foucauldian and Beckian scholarship.

Contrary to Foucauldian interpretations, the case studies have shown that Presidents and decision-makers often lack control of the consequences of their own action, and that their efforts to control sometimes backfire. Contrary to Beckian scholars, the case studies have cautioned against assigning these ‘blowbacks’ to unpredictable boomerang effects. Uncertainty and unpredictable consequences have certainly contributed to the emergence of crises, but a key role was played by the short-sightedness and minimalism of Presidential risk management. The analysis portrayed the risks Presidents managed, and those they ignored and dismissed. It also suggested why these ‘countervailing’ risks were dismissed, giving the opportunity to assess the President’s performance. Making clear what risk, uncertainty and risk management are, and the role they play, as much as giving a ‘real life’ portrayal of decision-makers, helps in showing continuity

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<sup>50</sup> Heng’s *War* represents an exception.

<sup>51</sup> Rasmussen, *The Risk Society*, p. 98.

in the nature and practice of foreign policy. Once risk, uncertainty and risk management are deprived of their aura of radical newness; and once the decision-maker is portrayed as struggling in his own predicament, many of the arguments for positing the existence of a stark Cold War/Post-Cold War divide become unclear.

#### *8.4.1.2 Risk and risk-taking, politics and foreign policy*

Questioning the existence of a Cold War/Post-Cold War divide represents the crucial node of the thesis. The research project, however, has brought to the surface other contributions. It found the 'decision theory' literature wanting. To be sure, within the risk-taking literature, Prospect Theory plays a key role. In this context, the main contribution of the thesis was the introduction of domestic politics and domestic constraints. It was argued that they do not represent only part of a President's perceptions of his 'domain,' but forces of their own. The analysis has agreed with many insights provided by Prospect Theory. The case studies have provided confirmation for Prospect Theory scholars' understanding of commitment, and of Presidents' unwillingness to cut their losses and change policy. Whereas Prospect Theory understood these choices in terms of Presidents' psychology and perceptions - Presidents perceive to be in a domain of losses, hence they take increased risks - the risk vs. risk trade-off framework has discussed how the strategic and the political risks inherent in a change of policy make Presidents unwilling to change. The increased complexity of risk vs. risk trade-offs seems to provide a better interpretation for developments that would otherwise appear baffling using Prospect Theory. The Bay of Pigs invasion provides a case in point. It seems difficult to argue that in the immediate aftermath of the election, President Kennedy perceived himself to be in a domain of losses,<sup>52</sup> and yet he took extraordinary risks in carrying out the invasion plan. The risk vs. risk

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<sup>52</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *One Thousand Days* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), and Richard Goodwin, *Remembering America* (New York: Little Brown, 1988).

framework has shown how the cancellation of the invasion posed unacceptable political risks to Kennedy. At the same time, the strategic risks of an open confrontation with Cuba made the President unwilling to show America's hand.

The analysis of the case studies has also provided a richer account of the President's predicament. In the risk vs. risk trade-off framework, the President maintains the role of final decision-maker, but the amount of freedom he enjoys proves to be much more limited than the one granted by Prospect Theory scholars. The case studies have often showed Presidents battling against several forces and contradictory pressure. Organisational powerhouses (the CIA before the Bay of Pigs), domestic media (with Clinton during the Bosnia war), Congressional challenges (the Javits resolution against Iran, or the various attempts to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia) have often constrained a President's choices. As we have seen in **Chapter 3** and **4**, this account is partially in line with 'bureaucratic politics' approaches and with the understanding of the President as pushed and pulled by several forces and pressures, but still at the helm of foreign policy. The account provided here suggests that Presidents are not 'uncommitted thinkers',<sup>53</sup> but the ultimate risk managers.

#### *8.4.1.3 Crisis, risk, and foreign policy*

Finally, acknowledging the complexity of international politics and the inter-play between strategic and domestic variables also contributes in three main ways to the scholarship on foreign policy crises. First, it helps in re-balancing (if only marginally) the huge literature on crises. As **Chapter 3** made clear, within this literature, most of the attention is reserved for the process of crisis management, and crises are generally understood as clearly circumscribed events. The risk vs. risk trade-off framework rejects this

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<sup>53</sup> Morton Halperin (with Priscilla A. Clapp and Arnold Kanter), *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), pp. 4 and 16.

approach. First, it shifts the focus from crisis management to the long pre-crisis period. Second, looking at the accumulation of ignored or dismissed risks, it provides a richer and more complex interpretation of the origins of crises.

From this longer-term perspective, the second contribution to the crisis literature emerges. The idea that crises are clearly defined events has led most of the literature to focus on the identification of clear ‘mistakes’ either in terms of decisions, or in terms of decision-making process. This led to the conclusion that, once those changes are implemented in decision-making groups and processes, crises will become manageable, sometimes risky, but always controlled events. Shifting the focus away from the management stage and stressing the absence of a clear ‘pre-crisis’ period, the thesis has made clear how risk and uncertainty play a key role, and has identified the potential of foreign policy issues to get out of control and slowly become crises. To be sure, some crisis scholars<sup>54</sup> discuss this point, but this project has put it under the spotlight.

The third contribution addresses a key dispute among crisis scholars. Beyond the manageability and the timing of crisis, the object of crisis has been one of the most contentious issues. As we have seen, scholars such as Michael Brecher<sup>55</sup> argue that crises occur only when core values are threatened. On the opposite side, scholars such as Jutta Weldes and Thomas Halper suggest that decision-makers can turn even a threat to ‘appearances’ into an occasion for crisis.<sup>56</sup> The ‘risks vs. risks trade-off’ framework helps in taking a middle way. Interplay between strategic factors and political

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, *Between peace and war* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), and Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

<sup>55</sup> Michael Brecher, *Crises in World Politics* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> Jutta Weldes, *Constructing national interests: the United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), and Thomas Halper, *Foreign Policy Crises: appearance and reality in decision-making* (Columbus: Merrill Publishing Company, 1971).



factors drives foreign policy decision-making. Politics and appearances contribute to crises, but there also needs to 'be something' out there. Weldes is correct in mentioning Kennedy's point that the missiles in Cuba threatened US appearances of strength.<sup>57</sup> This, however, does not mean that strategic factors need to be excluded, or that appearances are enough to make a crisis. In the case of Cuba, appearances were particularly under threat as a consequence of the choices made prior to the discovery of the missiles. It took a particular type of weapon in Cuba, a particular deception from the Soviet Union, tremendous domestic pressure in Washington, and a precise series of short-sighted choices to make a crisis. The mismanagement of the risks posed by Cuba had turned the missiles into a political catastrophe and a strategic blow for the Administration. It might seem an obvious remark, but there would have been no Missile Crisis without missiles, regardless of the appearances.

#### *8.4.1.4 Kennedy, Carter and Clinton: enriching the historical account.*

The crises discussed in the thesis represent, for reasons that should now be clear, typical case studies in US foreign policy. Their typical nature, however, does not imply that the account provided does not contribute to both the US foreign policy literature and the specific literatures on the three administrations involved. In terms of contributions to US foreign policy and Presidential decision-making literatures, three main contributions can be identified. The first contribution comes from the particular approach taken by the thesis. As the introductory paragraphs in the three case studies chapters have made clear, most of the scholarship on these crises focuses on the crisis management period. The account provided here shifts the attention to the 'normality period.' Second, the discussion of Presidential decision-making has identified continuities not only across different international and domestic contexts,<sup>58</sup> but also across different

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<sup>57</sup> Weldes, *Constructing*, p. 99.

<sup>58</sup> A much broader argument suggesting continuities and the relevance of 'political time' across Presidencies can be found in Stephen Skowronek, *The*

organisational structures. The thesis, in other words, seems to suggest that the structure of the national security apparatus and the organisation of the Administration are less important than the decisions taken by those at the helm, that is, the Presidents. Third, the thesis seems to shed some light on the role of foreign policy in Presidential campaigns. It is generally argued that domestic issues typically decide Presidential elections. Yet, the Presidents considered in this study have often made foreign policy promises that they have been unwilling or unable to maintain.<sup>59</sup>

Beyond these general points, each chapter provides different contributions to the scholarship on the Administrations. In the case of Cuba, it would be hard to claim that something radically new can be added to the literature. Still, the account takes advantage of recently released documents and recently published books to enrich the understanding of the 'eighteen months' prior to the fateful 'thirteen days.' The chapter on the Carter Administration provides several contributions to the relevant literature. First, it suggests that the prominent role given to the Vance-Brzezinski rivalry in the account of the Administration's decision-making should be rethought. As the study has shown, on Iran, the rivalry emerged only when it was arguably too late to save the Shah. Similarly, the analysis seems to undermine accounts of the Carter Administration's policies in terms of a 'Carter conversion.' In Brian Auten's account, an initially liberal Carter hardened to the reality of Soviet power and moved towards a more traditional Cold War stand.<sup>60</sup> The analysis provided here suggests that on the Iranian issue, Carter adopted a 'hard' stand from the start, with only lip-service to human rights commitments and to the reduction of arms sales.

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*Politics Presidents make* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also Stephen Skowronek, 'Presidential Leadership in Political time,' in Michael Nelson (Ed.), *The Presidency and the political system* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1990).

<sup>59</sup> I. M. Destler, Leslie Gelb, and Anthony Lake have made a similar point. It might be worth updating their work with additional research. See *Our own worst enemy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984)

<sup>60</sup> Brian J. Auten, *Carter's Conversion* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008).

Furthermore, the chapter relies on a wide range of primary sources, including documents released by the Carter Presidential Library after 2009, and interviews. Finally, the Clinton chapter sheds a new light on the so-called 'containment phase' of the war in Bosnia. In particular, it relies on interviews and on recently released primary sources such as the documents obtained by the NSA through FOIA requests, and documents from the personal collection of Anthony Lake held at the Library of Congress.

#### **8.4.2 Additional contributions**

Beyond the specific contributions to the literatures discussed above, the research provides additional benefits. The first benefit comes from the project's discussion of risk management in a foreign policy context. As we have seen, few works establish a link between foreign policy and risk management and, among these, even fewer provide a clear understanding of risk management. The research helps in increasing the 'conversation' between risk-managers and foreign policy decision-makers. This work acknowledges the need to break 'specialized silos,' growing around problems affecting international affairs. The project recognises that acting as risk-managers 'comes natural' to foreign policy decision-makers,<sup>61</sup> and that making this connection explicit might bring benefits.

Although this project has avoided offering any direct advice to foreign policy decision-makers, it seems clear that some lessons could be drawn. The analysis points towards a dangerous tendency to focus on short-term risks at the expenses of longer term ones.<sup>62</sup> It also stresses the complexity of foreign policy situations and of the risks each choice entails. Too often, the debate on risks is limited to empty positions such as 'the risks of inaction,' as if action implied no risks. This premium on action hides, more often than not, the complexity of the situation. The ideal choice here, would be a 'risk

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<sup>61</sup> For similar points see Bracken *et al.*, *Managing*, p. 304.

<sup>62</sup> Similarly, psychodynamic approaches to risk demonstrate that people fear short-term risk more than longer terms ones. See Paul Slovic, *Perception of Risk* (London: Routledge/Earthscan, 2000)

superior move' using additional time and information. This would not guarantee success, but would at least increase its chances.<sup>63</sup> As we have seen, however, political and strategic constraints often prevent Presidents from doing so, and Presidents often ignore or dismiss the risks inherent in their choices. Similarly, the understanding of decisions in terms of trade-offs might help to ease policymakers' tendency to 'having-it-all-ism:' the illusion that choices and improvements can be made without sacrifices.<sup>64</sup> Even if prescriptions are completely avoided, the project's use of risk management provides a coherent interpretation of decisions, tries to reach several specialised audiences, and hopes to kick-start inter-disciplinary discussions.

In particular, this research discusses a specific form of risk management - 'risk vs. risk trade-offs' – and, hence, contributes to that 'community.' As discussed in **Chapter 3**, Graham and Wiener initially developed this framework to deal with environmental and health problems. In more recent years, the discussion of risk vs. risk has expanded to other sectors. Jessica Stern and Jonathan Wiener have used the framework to assess the policies of the George W. Bush Administration in the fight against terrorism.<sup>65</sup> Adrian Vermeule has used the same framework to look at developments in constitutional law. Using Albert Hirschman's 'effects', he has discussed how regulatory efforts can lead to futility, perversity, or jeopardy.<sup>66</sup> This project has avoided this type of judgment but Hirschman's categories offer interesting insights for further research.

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<sup>63</sup> Graham and Wiener, *Risk vs. Risk*, p. 37.

<sup>64</sup> David Rothkopf, 'Why America can't have it all,' *Foreign Policy*, 25 June 2012

[[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/25/why\\_america\\_cant\\_have\\_it\\_all?page=0,0](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/25/why_america_cant_have_it_all?page=0,0)] (accessed 22 August 2013).

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Wiener and Jessica Stern, 'Precaution against Terrorism,' in Bracken *et al.*, *Managing*.

<sup>66</sup> Adrian Vermeule, 'Precautionary Principles in constitutional law,' *Journal of Legal analysis*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 2012), pp. 181-222. The three categories (perversion, jeopardy, and futility) are taken from Albert Hirschman's work on the rhetoric of reaction. Albert Hirschman, *Rhetoric of reaction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

### **8.4.3 Countervailing risks: possible objections to the project**

Before looking at avenues of further research, it seems necessary to acknowledge and discuss some of the possible objections to the project. This section identifies two main sets of possible objections. The first set includes three objections that concern the nature of the project and particularly its extent, its interpretive outlook and its problematic classification. The second set identifies possible objections relating to the purpose of the project and, in particular, to the selection of case studies and to the stress of continuity that characterises the thesis.

#### *8.4.3.1 The nature of the project*

The project starts with a willingness to gauge the extent of the Cold War/post-Cold War divide. The thesis, however, is mainly concerned with uncertainty, risk and risk management, and it suggests the development of a new understanding of these concepts. In this sense, the first objection might be that the thesis seems to end in a different place from where it started; that it is trying to do too much. This, however, can be explained. A particular type of literature sparked the initial curiosity: the sociological accounts of risk that had made it into IR. To assess the claims made by this literature, the project had to analyse them and to assess their key features. Throughout the analysis, it became clear that the claim of a radical Cold War/post-Cold War divide relied on the understanding that risk, uncertainty and risk management represented radically new features of the post-Cold War world. It also became clear that these assumptions relied on particular definitions of risk, uncertainty, and risk management. To question the myth of the divide, the thesis had to tackle the problems within this literature. The thesis suggested that if risk and uncertainty are stripped of their Foucauldian and Beckian trappings, their role in foreign policy becomes clearer and their newness is questioned. As a final step, if risk, uncertainty, and risk management are relevant in contexts and case studies along the Cold War/post-Cold War divide, the argument for continuity is made. In this

sense, the research project is not made up of two different projects: demonstrating the relevance of risk, risk management and uncertainty, means identifying continuities, questioning the divide, and vice-versa.

Two further possible objections present themselves. First, the research is an interpretive study. This issue was already discussed in **Chapter 4**, but a few words are in order in this conclusion. The case studies have discussed the emergence of foreign policy crises and they have identified several factors contributing to the shift from foreign policy issue to full-blown crisis. It could be argued that the project did not 'explain' the emergence of those crises. It did not identify a variable or key variables that *caused* the crisis. As **Chapter 4** made clear, however, the purpose of the research was not to identify clear relations of causation, but rather to interpret the emergence of crisis. The case studies have not been tested against an objective truth, but against other interpretations.<sup>67</sup> The thesis suggested that the management of risks - adjusted for the presence of uncertainty - played a key role in the emergence of crises; not that it was the only cause. In this context, the account provided could also be seen as too deterministic. This objection must be acknowledged, whilst keeping in mind two elements; first, the effort made by the research to provide a balanced account in which uncertainty plays an important role; and second, the premium on complexity and richness inherent in the interpretive approach and in case studies.

Second, this research lies at the crossroads between the risk literature and the decision-making literature. In an email exchange, one author from the Beckian scholarship criticised the argument made in this project suggesting that it took a 'micro' perspective (that of decision-making) to criticise works addressing the macro level (of sociological developments).<sup>68</sup> The criticism

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<sup>67</sup> Mark Neufeld, 'Interpretation and the "science" of International Relations,' *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (January 1993), p. 48.

<sup>68</sup> Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, Email exchange with the author, 20 August 2012.

seems fair. To be sure, the sociological literature has several merits, including: questioning the expansion of governments' technologies of control, exposing the difficulties encountered by nation states in the confrontation against terrorism, and identifying a shift in war and strategy from complete victory to prudent risk management. However, the project has targeted those areas in which these 'macro' studies moved from more general sociological developments to the description of how decisions are made in the various 'risk societies' or 'governmentality' worlds. The project does not question the validity of the Beckian and Foucauldian scholarships themselves. It criticises these schools' interpretation of decision-making, and warns against the generalisations and simplifications these schools indulge in when moving from 'macro' to the 'micro' level.

#### *8.4.3.2 The cases selected and the purposes of the project*

The main aim of the thesis has been to show continuities in foreign policy decision-making between the Cold War and the Post-Cold War world. One gap, however, could perhaps be identified in the thesis: the lack of a post-9/11 case study. The decision not to include such case study has been taken for both theoretical and practical reasons. On the theoretical side, the thesis has targeted mainly the sociological literature and in most of this literature 9/11 is interpreted as the latest radicalisation of processes that had started with the end of the Cold War. On the practical side, the project is focused on Presidential decision-making and relies heavily on primary sources. The slow pace of declassification would have likely hindered analysis of a post-9/11 case study. These points notwithstanding, the thesis points to the initial validity of an approach – the 'risk vs. risk trade-offs' framework - that can be applied to diverse issues in foreign policy-making in contrast to much current literature that focuses on counter-terrorism. In particular, the framework could help interpret the decision surrounding the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, suggesting that the permissive post-9/11 domestic context entailed an almost complete absence of domestic political risks. Furthermore, both the fine balancing act of the Obama Administration

regarding the conflict in Syria (including the 'red-line' on the use of chemical weapons), and the debate surrounding political risks and long-term strategic risks inherent in the use of drones<sup>69</sup> seem to conform to several of the points made in this thesis.

In terms of purposes, the research might be characterised as presenting a 'nothing has changed/nothing will ever change' type of argument. In this context, it seems necessary to fend off possible objections from Beckian and Foucauldian scholars. From a Beckian perspective, it is certainly true that the concept of 'risk' has taken the centre stage only in the 1990s as several sectors, disciplines and governments started to interpret the problems they faced explicitly in terms of risk. It is also true that international terrorism has become prominent in the post-9/11 world, and that terrorism poses particular types of challenges for which decision-makers may be ill-prepared. This project does not suggest that the international context or the type of crisis faced remained unchanged throughout the three case studies, nor that nothing has changed in terms of challenges confronting decision-makers. It states: first, that within these international contexts decision-makers faced situations of uncertainty, and had to manage risks; second, that these management efforts have always been defined by short-termism and minimalism; and third, that the way in which policymakers managed risks contributed to the emergence of crises. This project has tried to argue that uncertainties and risks did not appear overnight, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the collapse of the World Trade Center, and that decision-makers have dealt with them in comparable fashion. Similarly, it has argued that practices of risk management in foreign policy are not new, even if the name 'risk management' is.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Audrey Kurth Cronin, 'Why Drones fail: when tactics drive strategy,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (July/August 2013), pp. 44-54 and Daniel Byman, 'Why drones work: The Case for Washington's Weapon of Choice,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (July/August 2013), pp. 32-43.

<sup>70</sup> For an account of how the DoD confronted uncertainty and managed resources and risks under Robert McNamara, see Alain Enthoven and Wayne K. Smith, *How much is enough: shaping the defense program, 1961-1969* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).



The stress on continuity may also provoke challenges from Foucauldian quarters. As **Chapter 2** made clear, events such as Snowden's revelations concerning the PRISM program make 'Foucauldian arguments' look extremely appropriate for the post-9/11 world. The revelation that government agencies and private companies cooperated to collect information and meta-data from various types of communication reminds us of Butler's 'petty sovereigns' and should invite reflection on government's practices.<sup>71</sup> The breadth and depth of governments' means of control is certainly unprecedented, as are the opportunities to collect information. There is, however, a problem with defining PRISM and other systems as unprecedented in themselves. In a nutshell: these efforts of control are not unprecedented, the technology at their disposal is.<sup>72</sup> Within the Foucauldian scholarship, Wendy Larner argued that there was a key difference between previous systems of control and information collection, such as those supervised by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, and the post-9/11 ones. The post-9/11 ones can rely on a wide array of technologies than can be shaped into a single assemblage. Although this is true, arguing for complete difference means arguing that had Hoover been able to deploy the same technologies he would have politely refused. This seems unlikely.<sup>73</sup>

Only Gabe Mythen has acknowledged that claiming radical newness is very difficult. He stresses that it is foolish to claim the existence of 'new' or 'postmodern' terrorism on the basis of the techniques used. We should not expect, he correctly points out, terrorists to choose out-dated weapons or

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<sup>71</sup> Ewen MacAskill, 'Edward Snowden: how the spy story of the age leaked out,' *The Guardian*, 12 June 2013

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jun/11/edward-snowden-nsa-whistleblower-profile>) [accessed 22 August 2013].

<sup>72</sup> For some perspective see David Gomez, 'Hoovered,' *Foreign Policy*, 11 June 2013

([http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/11/fbi\\_hoover\\_nsa\\_prism\\_verizon\\_metadata?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/11/fbi_hoover_nsa_prism_verizon_metadata?page=full)), and Hayes Brown, 'America: Choosing Security Over Liberty Since 1798,' *Foreign Policy*, 11 June 2013

([http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/11/america\\_choosing\\_security\\_over\\_liberty\\_since\\_1798](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/11/america_choosing_security_over_liberty_since_1798)) (both accessed 22 August 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Larner, 'Spatial imaginaries,' p. 65.

techniques. Equally, he argues, we should not expect governments fighting them to rely on out-dated technologies. The techniques used by the British government against the IRA and the controls of (and effects on) society that emerged from that struggle are, according to Mythen, not different in nature from the ones adopted against the risk of terrorism. Only the level of technology changed.<sup>74</sup>

## 8.5 FUTURE AVENUES OF RESEARCH

Mythen's remark that the policies adopted to fight the IRA are not too dissimilar from the ones adopted in the fight against international terrorism, points directly to new avenues of research. Future projects could make terrorism one of the key objects of study. In particular, it would be interesting to analyse the policies adopted by the United States government to confront international terrorism and to compare them with those adopted against international communism during the Cold War. Such a project will discuss foreign and domestic policies adopted by the US government in the post-9/11 environment. These policies include: regime change; targeted killings; covert actions; and domestic strategies of control, such as screening and information collection. Like the current research, this new project would suggest a more nuanced interpretation of the Cold War. The superpower confrontation would emerge not so much as a predictable stalemate, but as a worldwide fight at several military and political levels.

Some authors have already pointed to the possibility of drawing comparisons. Marc Trachtenberg has suggested how 'preventive war' is not a new post-9/11 instrument, but had always been a possibility during the Cold War.<sup>75</sup> Stephen Kinzer has shown the frequent recurrence of 'regime

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<sup>74</sup> Gabe Mythen, 'The postmodern Terrorist risk: plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose,' in Jason L. Powell and Tim Owen (Eds.), *Reconstructing Postmodernism: critical debates* (Hauppauge: Nova Science, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> Marc Trachtenberg, 'Preventive War and US foreign policy,' in Marc Trachtenberg, *The Cold War and after* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

change' in US history.<sup>76</sup> Other authors, like Greg Grandin, have focused on regional areas suggesting how the policies adopted by the United States in Latin American during the Cold War represented a blueprint for the twenty-first century.<sup>77</sup> Finally, some have focused on military tactics, counterinsurgency and the fight in Central America, drawing comparisons with the War on Terror and Iraq. Mark Danner has argued that strategies and military tactics adopted against communist (or allegedly communist) forces in Guatemala resembled the counterinsurgency tactics of the War on Terror.<sup>78</sup> Peter Maas has polemically written about the 'Salvadorization' of Iraq, pointing out continuities in US personnel dealing with the two countries and in the tactics used.<sup>79</sup>

The putative new project would expand on these suggestions, including a broader range of issues and of policies. The project could provide an historical comparison, but it could also build on the research conducted for this project. In this context, the 'risk vs. risk trade-offs' framework could be adapted to compare and assess these strategies. Their effectiveness could be evaluated using the Hirschman/Vermeule criteria identified above, identifying the strategies' effects on the US government's position, on US interests, and, perhaps, on the country targeted. More specifically, the criteria would provide a framework to assess how the 'target risk' was managed, with what benefits, and at what costs, both in terms of opportunity costs and in terms of 'countervailing risks.' Hirschman's criteria could help in assessing whether counter-terrorism policies, and their Cold War counterparts, represented cases of futility, perversion or jeopardy.

To be sure, it is too early to decide which particular avenue of research future projects will follow, and to decide if the projects will be limited to

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<sup>76</sup> Stepehn Kinzer, *Overthrow* (London: MacMillan, 2007).

<sup>77</sup> Greg Grandin, *Empire's workshop* (New York: MacMillan, 2006).

<sup>78</sup> Mark Danner, *The massacre at El Mozote* (New York: Knopf, 1994)

<sup>79</sup> Peter Maas, 'The Salvadorization of Iraq?' *The New York Times Magazine*, 1 May 2005, [[http://www.petermaass.com/articles/the\\_salvadorization\\_of\\_iraq](http://www.petermaass.com/articles/the_salvadorization_of_iraq)] (accessed 22 August 2013).

historical analysis or will delve further into risk management. However, one point is clear: both the study of continuity between the Cold War world and the contemporary one and the discussion of risk management in foreign policy can and should be expanded.

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